House of Commons

Public Accounts Committee

Widening participation in higher education

Fourth Report of Session 2008–09

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

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The Public Accounts Committee

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Report

Summary

Whilst overall participation in higher education has increased since 1999–2000, particular groups remain under-represented. Men from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly under-represented, particularly those from white ethnic backgrounds, as are young people living in deprived areas compared with the general population. Socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity and place of residence all influence the likelihood of an individual attending higher education, primarily because of their effect on attainment at school. GCSE performance is a strong predictor of higher education participation.

Between 2001–02 and 2007–08 the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (the Department) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (the Funding Council) allocated £392 million of widening participation funding to higher education institutions (hereafter 'universities'). Despite the substantial amount of expenditure, progress in widening participation has been slow.

Performance across the higher education sector varies. Overall, there is an improving trend in the participation of students coming from state schools, low participation neighbourhoods and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Some universities, however, perform significantly better or worse than expected and this varies by university type. The Russell Group of universities (16 self-selected major research intensive universities in England) in particular generally perform poorly. Accountability for performance remains weak because the Funding Council does not require universities to provide information on widening participation activities and expenditure. This should improve with the planned reintroduction of the requirement for universities to report on their widening participation strategies and activities.

Universities have a role to play in widening participation by working with schools to increase the pool of pupils who aspire to participate in higher education. Some run outreach activities with the aim of raising aspirations and achievement, for example, by providing advice and guidance at increasingly younger ages, and offering role models through mentoring. To be more effective, universities need to target schools in disadvantaged areas to reach those most in need.

On the basis of the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,[1] the Committee took evidence from the Department, the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access on progress in widening participation.

1 C&AG's Report, *Widening participation in higher education*, HC (2007–08) 725

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **Although the gap is narrowing, more than twice the proportion of people from upper socio-economic backgrounds go into higher education than those from lower socio-economic groups.** The participation of young full-time students from lower socio-economic backgrounds has improved slightly, by two percentage points over the last four years. Nevertheless, although this group make up around a half of the population of England, they still only represent just 29% of young full-time first entrants to higher education.

2. **The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Higher Education Funding Council know too little about how universities have used the £392 million allocated to them over the last five years to widen participation.** The requirement for universities to report annually on their widening participation activities is being reintroduced. It will be important that the information provided is sufficiently detailed and comprehensive so that universities' progress in widening participation is clear and transparent. The Funding Council and Office for Fair Access should use such information to help spread good practice and hold universities to account if they do not meet their commitments.

3. **Guidance for young people on how to progress into higher education is often of variable quality and not provided face-to-face.** Poor advice and guidance can lead to potential students making the wrong choices about which subjects to study, making unrealistic applications or not applying at all. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Department for Children, Schools and Families should jointly provide teachers, particularly those offering careers advice, with up-to-date guidance on the financial support available for students and the academic requirements for chosen career paths.

4. **In 2006–07, some 12,000 students did not apply for a bursary, although many were likely to have met the necessary criteria.** While information on financial assistance is available from a range of sources, it is not easily accessible or understood. The Department should develop a single source of information to enable potential students to identify easily the bursaries and grants for which they may be eligible.

5. **Although performance at school is a strong predictor of entry to higher education and is influenced by a number of factors, early contact with universities can help overcome some young people's reservations about higher education.** While more young people living in deprived areas are now going to university, they are, as a group, still less likely to obtain good GCSEs and progress to higher education than those not living in deprived areas. University mentoring of secondary school pupils living in deprived areas, primary school networks and pre-entry programmes can help raise the ambitions of young people. These initiatives and others need to be much more widespread than at present if more people from deprived areas are to benefit.

6. **Despite the potential benefits for their pupils, some schools in England do not have links to a university and do not access widening participation activities.** The Funding Council has issued guidance for universities on the targeting of activities, but there is limited regional or national oversight to ensure that all schools are targeted adequately. The Department and the Funding Council should, jointly with the Department for Children, Schools and Families, review the coverage of widening participation activities and encourage every school to establish regular contact with at least one university.

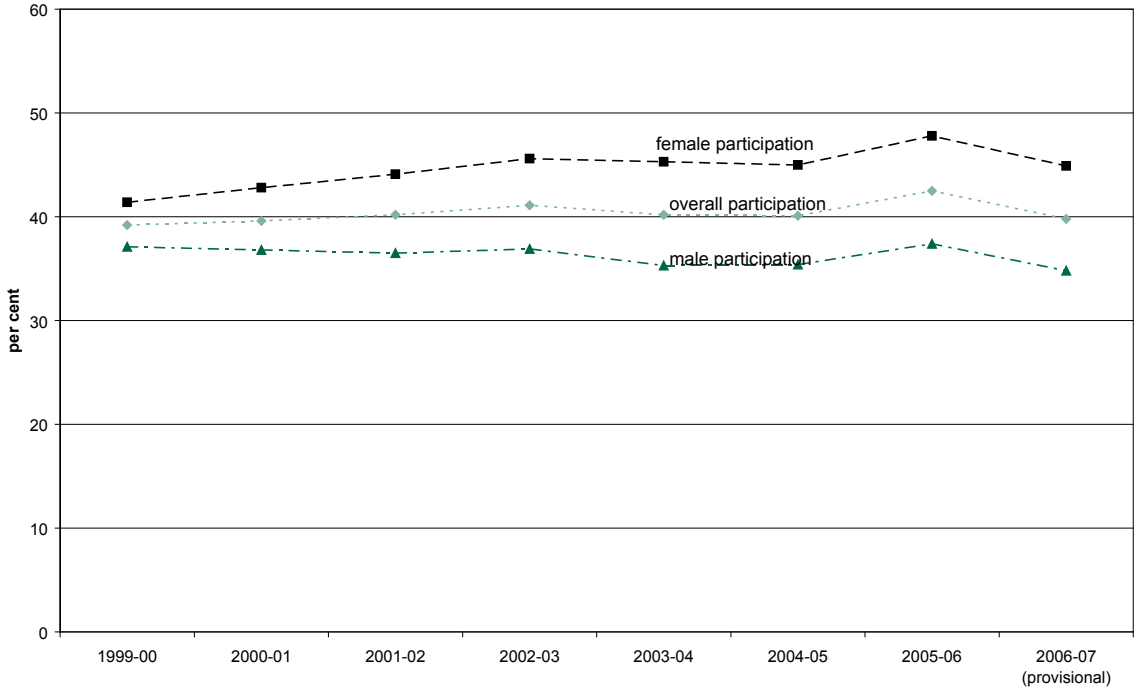
7. **Many universities, particularly those in the Russell Group, perform poorly in admitting students from under-represented groups.** The existing funding formula is not designed to provide incentives for universities to widen participation. The Funding Council should agree specific improvement plans for those universities performing consistently poorly, and should encourage better performing universities to share good practice with those that are less successful.

8. **Data collected by universities and UCAS on the characteristics of the student population is incomplete.** Although data is collected nationally, it is incomplete, particularly for part-time students and in relation to the socio-economic background of full-time students. In addition, little is known about the extent to which disabled students and people from care participate in higher education. The Funding Council should research the participation of such groups, and develop and promote the use of measures which best capture participation rates, such as pupil data linked with higher education records.

1 Progress in widening participation

1. The term 'widening participation' refers to activities for improving the participation rates[2] of people from under-represented groups by encouraging them to apply to higher education. Overall participation in higher education has increased slightly over the past five years (**Figure 1**) and the take up of places amongst women (**Figure 1**) and some ethnic groups (**Figure 2**) has been strong. In contrast, participation rate of some groups remain poor, and people of white ethnic background, particularly men, and people of black-Caribbean origin are under-represented.

Figure 1—Higher Education Initial Participation Rate for England from 1999–2000 to 2006–07, split by gender

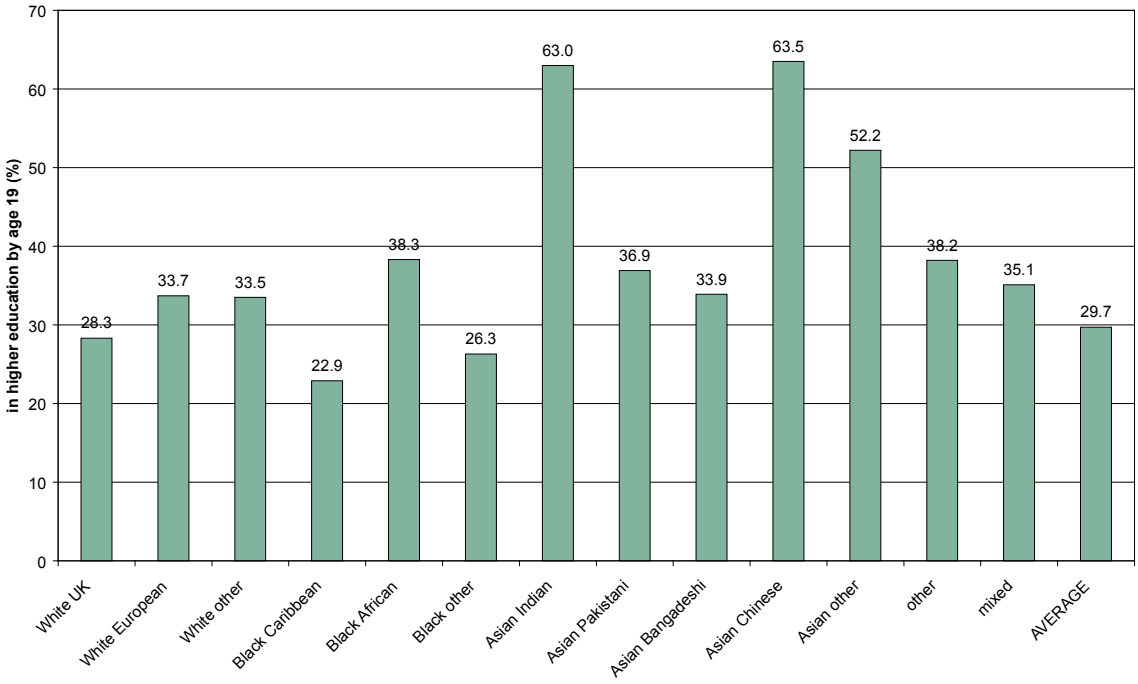


Note: the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate measures the sum of participation rates for each age 17–30, roughly equivalent to the probability that a 17 year old will enter higher education by age 30. It is used to calculate progress against the Department's Public Service Agreement target to 'increase participation in higher education towards 50 per cent of those aged 18–30 with growth of at least a percentage point every two years in the academic year 2010-11'.

Source: Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, Statistical First Release: Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic Years 1999/2000–2006/07 (Provisional), 27 March 2008 available on http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000780/index.shtml

2 Participation rate is the proportion of a particular group in higher education compared with the proportion in the general population

Figure 2—Higher education participation rates up to the age of 19 by ethnic group



Source: Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills analysis of linked data on higher education students (Higher Education Statistics Agency) and school records (National Pupil Database) 2005–06.

2. Progress in improving the participation of young people from lower socio-economic groups[3] has been slow, although the gap between the upper and lower socio-economic groups has narrowed (**Figure 3**). White males from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly under-represented in higher education, and are a challenging group.

3. The difference in rates of higher education participation can largely be explained by differences in school attainment. Low achievement by pupils at school is the principal explanation for variation by socio-economic background. Two-thirds of those with five or more GCSEs are in higher education by age 19 compared with 12% of those without.[4] There are virtually no differences in university acceptance rates by socio-economic background when prior attainment is taken into account.[5]

4. The level of deprivation in the area where an individual lives affects educational achievement. The 20% of pupils who live in the most deprived wards make up only 11% of those who attain five or more GCSEs at school.[6] The Office for Fair Access confirmed that deprivation also correlates with other factors such as unemployment, dependence on welfare and the stability of family structures.[7]

3 Students from family backgrounds where the main wage-earner is from one of the following: small employers and own account workers; lower supervisory and technical operations; semi-routine occupations; routine occupations. It refers to National Statistics Socio-Economic Class groups 4, 5, 6, 7.

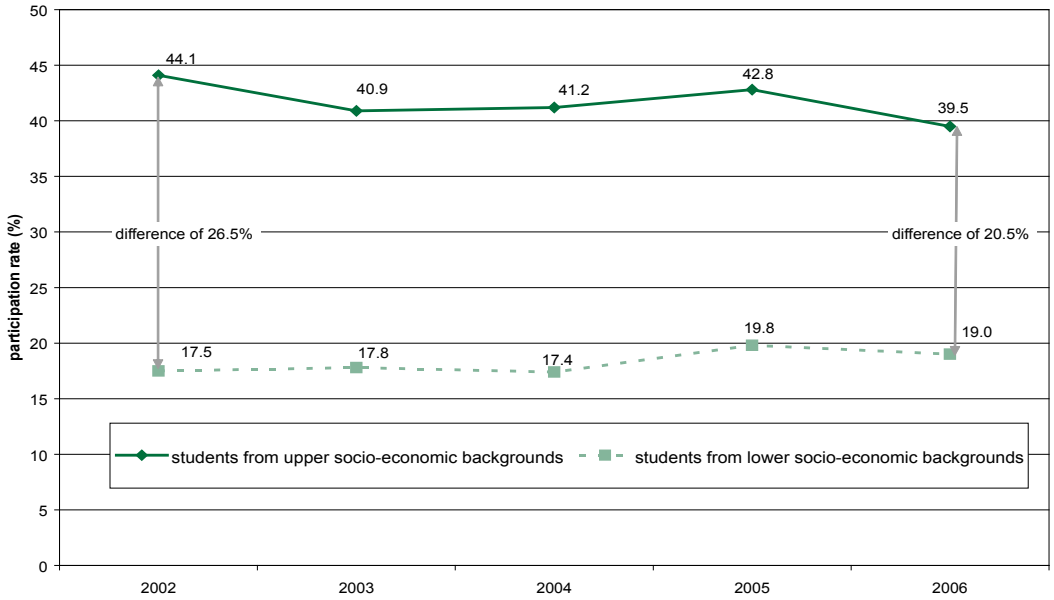
4 C&AG's Report, para 1.8

5 C&AG's Report, para 1.7, Figure 7

6 C&AG's Report, para 1.8

7 Q 92

Figure 3—Participation rate of young, full-time students by socio-economic background



Notes: 'Upper socio-economic background' refers to National Statistics Socio-Economic Class groups 1, 2, 3 and 'lower socio-economic background' refers to groups 4, 5, 6, 7. The Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) measure shows the number of 18, 19 and 20 year old English—domiciled first time participants in full-time higher education as a proportion of the 18, 19 and 20 year old population of England, split into participation rates for the upper and lower National Statistics socio-economic groups.
Source: Data from Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC), 2008 Update, 25 June 2008 available on http://www.dius.gov.uk/research/documents/FYPSEC%20paper%202008.pdf.

5. Many young people have low educational aspirations, achieve poor levels of attainment and leave education at early ages. They need better role models and universities need to be encouraged to develop stronger links with schools. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (the Department) reported that every university has some connection with schools, but the activities that they provide differ. Although the relative effectiveness of different activities is difficult to demonstrate there is some evidence that mentoring schemes, where higher education students provide support, encouragement and advice to school pupils, are valuable.[8] However, not every school is involved with a mentoring scheme.[9]

6. There is still latent demand for higher education, although the Office for Fair Access believes it is probably unreasonable to expect that people from upper and lower socio-economic backgrounds will ever participate at equal rates.[10] The Department has not set a maximum for participation rates above which it thinks progress is unachievable, preferring to stimulate demand rather than set targets for universities.[11]

8 C&AG's Report, para 2.28

9 Q 22

10 Q 94

11 Q 93

7. Universities face the challenge of maintaining student retention rates while also increasing and widening participation. The Department confirmed that universities with higher proportions of students from deprived backgrounds have higher drop-out rates, mainly due to lower prior attainment.[12] In its recent report on student retention, the Committee noted that students from backgrounds without a family or school tradition of participation in higher education are, on average, more likely to withdraw from higher education. In recruiting them, universities accept the risk of reducing overall retention rates.[13]

8. The Department does not routinely compare performance in widening participation in England with other countries, principally because of significant differences between educational systems.[14] This may result in the Department not learning valuable lessons from the experiences of others. There are large differences between the participation rates of English regions, for example, young people living in London are 50% more likely to enter higher education than those in the North East. The Funding Council informed the Committee, however, that once population composition (for example, parental education levels) is taken into account, there are no significant regional patterns to young participation rates in higher education.[15]

9. The Department does not have data on backgrounds and characteristics for a large proportion of students. Around one-third of data on students' socio-economic background is missing, principally because it is optional for applicants to declare their parents' occupations at the application stage. This may affect the accuracy of the reported trends in participation.[16] The Department informed the Committee that some measures of participation adjust for the impact of missing data by other means, for example, through assigning students to a socio-economic group based on their postcode.[17]

10. The Office for Fair Access stated that having one or more parents who have been to university is a strong factor influencing participation in higher education.[18] UCAS[19] has recently started collecting data on the parental education of applicants, although it is optional for applicants to declare this information, and a high proportion of applicants have declined to do so.[20]

11. The Department considers that the current economic downturn is unlikely to reduce participation levels. Provisional figures for applications for 2008–09 show an increase of 9.5% on the previous year's figures.[21] Historically, people are more likely to apply to

12 Qq 105, 144; Ev 20

13 Committee of Public Accounts, Tenth Report of Session 2007–08, *Staying the course: The retention of students on higher education*, HC 322, para 6

14 Qq 127–132

15 Qq 123–125; Ev 20

16 Q 120

17 Qq 120–122

18 Qq 101–102

19 Formerly known as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

20 Ev 20

21 Qq 10–15; http://www.ucas.ac.uk/website/news/media_releases/2008/2008

undertake, and stay in, higher education when employment is scarcer.[22] At such times, people considering higher education are more likely to think about which qualifications and subjects will be of long-term value.[23] The Department estimates that a graduate earns around £100,000 additional net income over a lifetime compared with a non-graduate, although this is an average figure which varies by subject, and probably also by university.[24]

22 Q 79

23 Q 80

24 Q 77

2 How the Department and the Funding Council are seeking to widen participation

12. The Department has overall responsibility for public spending in higher education in England, but delegates day-to-day responsibility for dealing with universities to the Higher Education Funding Council (the Funding Council). The Funding Council encourages universities to achieve the Government's strategic objectives, primarily through funding incentives. In 2006–07, the Funding Council granted £6.7 billion to universities, including £4.2 billion for the teaching of higher education courses, with most of the balance allocated for research and capital expenditure. The Funding Council has distributed £392 million of funding to universities for widening participation measures over the last six years.

13. The Funding Council can influence universities' behaviour in widening participation rates in a number of ways, the most important of which is a funding distribution model based on expected student numbers. The Higher Education Statistics Agency publishes a range of performance data at the level of individual universities, but this is not used by the Department or the Funding Council to take action against particular universities. A number of organisations identify and promote good practice in relation to widening participation, for example, Action on Access.[25]

14. The Funding Council's method for allocating widening participation funding to universities is based on the number of students a university recruits from under-represented groups, rather than funding widening participation activities directly. The formula reflects the additional costs of recruiting and supporting students from these under-represented groups, so universities with more of these students receive more funding.[26] In 2006–07, individual universities received between £10,000 and £5 million. The sums ranged from less than 1% of the university's teaching and learning grant to over 10%. Universities are not required to report on how they spend their funding and have considerable freedom in how they use it.

15. The Funding Council did not intend the funding to be a reward or incentive for success in widening participation, but a reimbursement to remove a disincentive. For selective universities (defined as those which are generally oversubscribed), the incentive to widen participation amongst under-represented groups is not financial as they do not need to recruit students to fill places. Rather, the Funding Council sees the incentive as the desire to choose the ablest applicants from all educational and social backgrounds.[27]

16. The Office for Fair Access was set up in 2004 to promote and safeguard access to higher education for under-represented groups following the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006–07. All universities charging tuition fees must have an access agreement, approved by the Office for Fair Access, that sets out their measures for fair access. The Office for Fair Access can refuse to approve an agreement where performance targets are not sufficiently

25 C&AG's Report, para 2.2

26 Qq 56–58

27 Q 58

stretching, and it monitors annual performance against these agreements. It can impose sanctions, although to date it has not found it necessary to do so.[28]

17. Until 2003–04, the widening participation funding was conditional upon providing acceptable strategies and action plans to the Funding Council. The Department withdrew this requirement in order to minimise the administrative burden on universities, following the introduction of access agreements.[29] The Department and the Funding Council are planning to reintroduce the requirement for universities to produce and publicise a consistent statement of what they are doing to widen participation.[30] They intend to ask universities to provide an overall assessment of: student financial support (previously in the Access agreement), widening participation activities and schemes, and admissions policies. This is intended to provide greater clarity on the level of investment in widening participation, including how universities spend the government allocation.

18. There is no single national government widening participation strategy that describes a national approach to widening participation. The Funding Council informed the Committee that each university has a strategy, and there are national programmes such as Aimhigher and the 'Gifted and Talented' scheme which target individuals with the potential to progress onto higher education. In addition, the Funding Council issues guidance for universities, for example, on targeting widening participation activities at disadvantaged areas most in need. It regards these as collectively constituting a national strategic approach.[31]

19. On the maintenance of academic standards, the Department stated that while it could not guarantee to maintain academic excellence as it widened participation, all the evidence suggests that standards have remained high as participation has both increased and widened.[32]

20. Schools play an important role in encouraging young people to consider participating in higher education. It is essential that pupils are targeted when young so that they are aware of the need to achieve at school. Waiting until pupils reach age 16 or 17, the time when they might be considering which subjects to study and to which universities to apply, is too late to influence attitudes to continuing education and academic performance.

21. Universities are approaching school pupils through the national Aimhigher programme, their own programmes of outreach, and formal partnership arrangements such as sponsorship through academies. The general aim of these activities is to raise the aspirations and thereby the achievements of pupils to enable them to progress to higher education. The Department believes that every university is likely to work with at least one school, but there is no guarantee that every school has access to these activities.[33] Aimhigher selects individual schools, based on targeting guidance issued by the Funding

28 C&AG's Report, paras 2.15–2.16

29 C&AG's Report, paras 2.7–2.8

30 Q 18

31 Q 36

32 Q 10

33 Qq 21–22

Council. For other outreach activities, universities decide which schools to approach, in some cases based on patterns of participation identified by the Funding Council.

22. Information, advice and guidance given to school pupils on entry requirements to higher education are not always readily available. They can be inaccurate and poorly timed, for example, too late to inform the appropriate choice of subjects for a given university course. There are examples of applicants discovering too late that they do not have the right qualifications for the courses they want to undertake.[34] The Department stated that there had been a move towards providing advice and guidance to younger children, including those at primary school, where it will have greatest impact on aspirations.[35] The Funding Council is also encouraging universities to clarify entrance requirements and increase flexibility in the university application system to accommodate students who may not have received appropriate advice.[36]

23. Some teachers appear to base the advice they give to pupils on their outdated experiences of higher education. This can result in students not receiving appropriate encouragement, support and advice on higher educational opportunities and the financial support available.[37] In addition, some teachers and parents may be reluctant to recommend the more selective universities because of perceived prejudices about the types of applicants.[38] As noted in paragraph 10, a significant influence on participation is whether individuals' parents attended university. Given the role that parents and teachers play in influencing young people, it is essential that they are also included in outreach activities. There are good examples of universities running information sessions for teachers and parents or holding events in communities for families.[39]

24. Local provision of higher education is increasingly important as more students choose to stay at home while studying. This may appeal to certain cultural groups in particular, for example, those where it is not the tradition for women to go to university.[40] Universities have traditionally worked with further education colleges to extend their provision and enable progression between the sectors.[41] There is now a national scheme, the New University Challenge, whereby universities in areas identified as having little or no higher education can bid for funding to develop local higher education.[42] The Funding Council plans to assess whether there is latent demand for higher education in a local area, then identify the most appropriate way to deliver this, for example, through an existing further education college or by establishing a new site.[43]

34 C&AG's Report, Box 19

35 Q 23

36 Q 43

37 Qq 72–73

38 Qq 45, 96

39 Q 37; C&AG's Report, Boxes 5–6

40 Q 108

41 C&AG's Report, Box 13, paras 3.25–3.26

42 Qq 27–31

43 Q 91

3 Universities' performance in widening participation

25. Although attainment at school largely determines access to higher education, universities have a role in widening participation. They must establish and maintain links with schools to raise aspirations and increase the pool of people who are able to progress to higher education. The Higher Education Statistics Agency publishes annual performance indicators, including student profiles, for individual universities. The indicators are intended to provide reliable and comparable information for a range of users, including prospective students, universities and the Funding Council. The publication of performance indicators provides an incentive for universities to perform well, and can affect universities' reputations for taking on students from under-represented groups and consequently the number of applications from these groups. The indicators are based on the participation of students from state schools, from areas with low participation in higher education, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.[44]

26. To enable more meaningful comparisons between universities, the Higher Education Statistics Agency calculates a set of widening participation benchmarks for each university in relation to each of the performance indicators. A university's benchmarks are based on the average participation rates for the whole sector, adjusted for the university's own profile of subjects offered and entry qualifications of students recruited. The benchmarks are not, however, targets and are not linked to sanctions or rewards.[45] Universities are not held to account for long-term, significant under-performance against the benchmarks.

27. The success of universities in widening participation varies, reflected in their student profiles. Russell Group universities (16 self-selected major research-intensive universities in England) generally perform significantly below their performance benchmarks and perform poorly compared with other types of university.[46] In general, the whole sector is improving but the rate of improvement is similar across all types of universities. As a result, the difference in performance between the Russell Group and other groups of universities remains largely the same.[47]

28. The Funding Council considers that there are valid explanations for the variations. The Russell Group universities offer a mix of subjects such as medicine, law and engineering, which appeal to students from backgrounds with a tradition of attending university. As a result, the Funding Council believes that the Russell Group is not discriminating against applicants from under-represented groups, as they have a smaller pool of such applicants from which to select.[48] Widening participation activities can benefit the whole higher education sector, not just the individual universities which undertake them. For example,

44 C&AG's Report, para 2.11

45 C&AG's Report, para 2.14

46 Qq 14–16

47 Qq 133–138

48 Qq 45–46

much of the work that Russell Group universities do with schools may promote applications to other universities.[49]

29. The amount of tuition fee income that universities choose to redistribute as bursaries varies considerably, as does the amount which an individual student can receive. In 2008–09, the value of bursaries for students receiving full maintenance grants varied across universities from a minimum of £310 to £3,150. In 2006–07, the proportion of tuition fee income redistributed by universities as bursaries ranged from 5% to 48%.[50] This can confuse students, teachers and parents when making decisions or offering guidance about where to study,[51] particularly as there is currently no single source of information to enable students to readily compare the value of bursaries and eligibility for them between universities.[52] A national bursary scheme would be simpler to understand, but the Office for Fair Access considers that universities operate in a market and the bursary system is intended to be used by universities to reflect their own circumstances. For example, some universities offer different levels of bursary, or have different eligibility criteria for different courses, reflecting relative popularity.

30. In the first year of bursaries, the majority of universities (64%) distributed less than they estimated, because of lower than predicted take-up. The Office for Fair Access estimates that the average bursary take up for 2006–07 for eligible students on full state support was around 80%, with up to 12,000 eligible students failing to collect a bursary.[53] This may be due to a number of factors including low student awareness of bursaries and eligibility, the complex and multiple sources of the information available, and a lack of clarity in the student finance application form.[54] The Office for Fair Access, the Students Loan Company and higher education institutions have made efforts to improve bursary awareness and take up. These efforts include a telephone campaign to encourage students to consent to share their financial information with their university and, from 2008–09, changing the student finance application form to require an active opt out of data sharing, rather than an active opt in. The Office for Fair Access expects to see a small improvement in take up rates in 2007–08 and the issue to be largely resolved in 2008–09.[55]

31. The Funding Council does not know how individual Oxford and Cambridge colleges perform in widening participation as its relationships are at the university, rather than individual college, level.[56] However, the Funding Council expects both universities to take an active role in encouraging improvement in representation of under-represented groups at the college level. The proposed widening participation strategy documents are expected to provide information aggregated across the colleges.[57]

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49 Q 70

50 C&AG's Report, para 3.20, Appendix 2

51 Qq 82–85

52 C&AG's Report, para 4.12

53 Q 162; C&AG's Report, para 3.21; Ev 21

54 C&AG's Report, para 3.22

55 Ev 21

56 Q 139

57 Q 142

32. Universities are providing higher education in more diverse ways to appeal to students from backgrounds with no tradition of higher education and with varying personal circumstances. For example, foundation degrees tend to appeal to more mature students over the age of 21 because they are able to study part-time, locally and through work-based delivery.[58] However, foundation degrees tend to be limited in scope so are not a viable pathway to some professions. Progression to more traditional subjects is possible, but rare, although students can gain a full honours degree with a further 12–15 months of full-time study.

58 C&AG's Report, para 3.13

Formal Minutes

Monday 2 February 2009

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon	Mr Austin Mitchell
Keith Hill	Dr John Pugh

Draft Report (*Widening participation in higher education*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 32 read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 4 February at 3.30 pm

Witnesses

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Fourth Report	Widening participation in higher education	HC 226

Oral evidence

Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Monday 20 October 2008

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon	Nigel Griffiths
Angela Browning	Keith Hill
Mr David Curry	Mr Austin Mitchell
Mr Ian Davidson	Mr Don Touhig

Mr Tim Burr, CB, Comptroller and Auditor General, **Mr Michael Whitehouse,** Assistant Auditor General and **Mr David Woodward,** Director, National Audit Office, gave evidence.

Ms Paula Diggle, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, was in attendance.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

Widening Participation in Higher Education (HC 725)

Witnesses: **Mr Ian Watmore,** Permanent Secretary, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, **Professor David Eastwood,** Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England, and **Sir Martin Harris,** Director for Fair Access, Office of Fair Access, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts where today we are looking at the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report entitled "Widening Participation in Higher Education" and we welcome to our Committee Ian Watmore from the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, Professor David Eastwood from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Sir Martin Harris from the Office of Fair Access. You are all very welcome. Mr Watmore, you spent roughly £392 million on widening participation from about 2001 to 2007. Why have you not made more progress, particularly with encouraging participation from people from disadvantaged socio-economic groups?
Mr Watmore: First of all, I welcome the Report and the recommendations. I think it is a good piece of work and I am very pleased to support it. On the specific question, we believe the money spent has proven to be good value for money at this point. Significant progress has been made on a number of fronts and of course a lot of the money that continues to be spent is for the longer term and it will be paid back in future years. We have reached the position where the gap has closed quite markedly between those in the upper and the lower socio-economic groups and indeed the participation at universities now is actually quite broadly based in many areas, particularly in gender and ethnicity where participation is most strong. Having said that, there is more to do. There is more to do in two or three key areas but particularly amongst white men from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. That is an area of focus. There is more to do on broadening the basis of people coming into university but also raising the aspirations of everyone to go to the highest end.

Q2 Chairman: Our brief tells us that whilst overall participation in higher education has increased slightly since 1999 particular groups remain under represented. If you look at box one which you can find on page 14, we find that there were two particular groups which seemed to suffer particularly badly. The black Caribbean and white, British working class are still very un-represented. What are you doing to try and improve participation of white, working-class men, particularly from working class backgrounds, in universities? They are still very un-represented.
Mr Watmore: The data on black Afro and Caribbean improves markedly for the population that is aged up to 30. By the time we take the cohort of people between the ages of 17 and 30, we find we get very good representation from the black Afro and Caribbean area which therefore leads us to believe that many of them join the university system slightly later than the traditional 17 or 18 year old access that many of us will be familiar with.

Q3 Chairman: You are not trying to say to this Committee that there is not a problem with black Caribbean young men and white, working-class men getting into universities, are you?
Mr Watmore: The white working class is the particular area.

Q4 Chairman: What are you doing about it then?
Mr Watmore: The particular set of initiatives that is laid out in the Report is beginning to bite. The most material area is to raise aspirations lower down the school age. The evidence of the Report is quite strongly that if you can raise the aspiration of people

at a younger age to go to university at all or for those people with particular skills to go to universities that are very selective, that flows through into the system.

Q5 Chairman: That is obvious. Give me some practical examples of how you are being proactive, going to schools, getting these bright kids, particularly white, working-class kids, pushing them forward and giving them these aspirations. We do not want general, bureaucratic speak. Give me some practical examples.
Mr Watmore: First of all, we have students who are at university today from disadvantaged backgrounds going back into schools to help mentor and coach kids from similar backgrounds that they have come from to show that it is possible. We have universities connecting directly with schools up and down the land, including even sponsoring schools like academies that are coming through the system. We have programmes to engage right throughout the formal part of the system for careers and advice, not just on careers but also on aspirations in the educational system. We have linkages with the further education system so that people who may have had their aspirations lower in the past can come through the system from further into higher. We have programmes—the so-called University Challenge—to put more places of higher education local to students so that potentially they can go to the universities without having to live away from home.

Q6 Chairman: If you look at 2.8 and 2.17, this is really about marching the troops up to the top of the hill and going down again. 2.8 tells us that you withdrew the requirement for widening participation on strategies in order to minimise the administrative burden. 2.17 tells us that, having done that one year, very soon afterwards the Department has asked the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access for advice on how institutions could bring together their widening participation. You are changing directions.
Mr Watmore: I think the ministers have been pretty consistent over quite a long period, including in the current incarnation of the Department, that widening participation is an agenda that matches the increase in participation overall. We want greater participation and we want wider participation.

Q7 Chairman: Why does it tell us that in 2.8, in order to minimise the administrative burden, the Department withdrew its requirement for strategies and action plans and, in 2.17, it tells us that the Department did the opposite?
Mr Watmore: Are you linking 2.8 to 2.17?

Q8 Chairman: That is the question I asked you, yes. It was in 2004 that you withdrew the requirement and now you are reintroducing it.
Mr Watmore: I am going to ask Martin to pick up on that one, if I may.

Q9 Chairman: I am asking the question of you, Mr Watmore. You are speaking for the Department. It is not fair to ask the Funding Council this question or the Office of Fair Access. It is down to you.
Mr Watmore: The guidance we are trying to give all the time through the Council and the Office of Fair Access with the universities—the Secretary of State set that out in a very good article in today's *Times*—is that we want to increase widening participation and fair access and have it integral with the policies of the university system as a whole.

Q10 Chairman: You are just repeating the answer that you gave a moment ago without attempting to answer the question I put to you so I will carry on now. Are you sure that you can maintain academic excellence as you widen participation? Can you guarantee that you can maintain academic excellence as you widen participation?
Mr Watmore: To guarantee anything is a strong statement. All the evidence points to the fact that as we have increased participation, as we have widened participation, standards have remained high. Therefore we do not see at this point in time the saturation in terms of the number of people able to go to university, the talent that we want to access and we do not see any diminution of standards in the university sector. For the moment I am comfortable that the policy direction is consistent with participation and quality.

Q11 Chairman: Professor Eastwood, did you see a recent speech by the chancellor of Oxford University where he was saying we should not bash universities for failing to widen participation. This is the fault of the schools for failing to promote it.
Professor Eastwood: I am aware of Lord Patten's remarks.

Q12 Chairman: What do you think of them?
Professor Eastwood: He points to something that the NAO Report also signals. Perhaps the greatest challenge is the transition from level two to level three, that is to say, getting people to stay on in the system beyond 16. I think that is common ground. I think there is quite a lot of partnership working to take that forward, but the view of HEFCE would be yes, it is important that we increase the pool of young people participating to level three but equally it is important that universities discharge their responsibilities to work to widen participation in higher education.

Q13 Chairman: It is not the fault of schools then?
Professor Eastwood: It is quite clear from the evidence, as we make progress in terms of participation post-16, then those young people flow into higher education. That is a key pressure point but nevertheless I think all universities do now take widening participation seriously.

Q14 Chairman: Look at box ten, please, on page 21. There is a huge variation, is there not, in participation? It is not surprising when we see that the universities with the worst record are the best ones, the Russell Group.
Professor Eastwood: It is clear that the Russell Group universities are, in the main, further away from their benchmarks. It is also the case that—

Q15 Chairman: It is obvious, reading this.
Professor Eastwood: At the same time, if you look at participation in Russell Group institutions over the last ten years, on all of the key indicators, participation from state schools, from lower socio-economic groups—

Q16 Chairman: There is an enormous variation between the Russell Group universities, the best universities, and the post-1992 universities. That is very clear, is it not?
Professor Eastwood: There is undoubtedly a difference in the student cohort. My point is that if you look at what is happening in the Russell Group universities there is progress there as elsewhere in the sector.

Q17 Chairman: Sir Martin, what do you think it would do for widening participation from lower socio-economic groups if we removed the cap on tuition fees? What is your personal opinion?
Sir Martin Harris: I think the decisions that have to be made in respect of the review need three full years of evidence. We do not have three full years of evidence yet. The evidence we have to date suggests that what determines whether young people go to university or not or to particular universities or not is not primarily financially driven.

Q18 Chairman: Why is there such a huge difference in the proportion of tuition fee income that institutions reach through bursaries? If you look at figure 17 in appendix two, it is staggering. It goes from 4% to 48%. These are universities and they are redistributing some of their fee income into bursaries. It is a very good idea, but there is a staggering difference between what these universities are doing. One I think is as low as 4% and another one is as high as 48%.
Sir Martin Harris: I think it goes back to one of your earlier questions. Because of the way access agreements are currently constituted, what universities do in respect of widening participation and fair access is recorded in some cases more fully in their access agreement than it is in other universities. That is one reason why all of us are agreed we should go back to one consistent statement of what a university is doing, including a financial appendix.

Q19 Mr Touhig: Why is it that white, British youngsters are the least likely to get five A to C. grade GCSEs?
Mr Watmore: I think the main area of policy for that lies outside of our Department so I am not going to particularly detail other departments' policies. What we find in general is that the aspiration level currently of white working class, white socially deprived kids is lower than it is for many other groups, particularly where it connects with further and higher education. That is what we, in our policies and working with—

Q20 Mr Touhig: Why is it lower?
Mr Watmore: A lot of the evidence points to two or three things but one of them is role models. This is why we look for people who have been through the system to connect back with kids of that age.

Q21 Mr Touhig: You talked about mentoring earlier in answer to the Chairman. How extensive is this mentoring? Does every university provide mentoring?
Mr Watmore: Every university has connections now with the schools throughout the country. Not every university does everything the same.

Q22 Mr Touhig: Not every school has university students coming in and mentoring their pupils.
Mr Watmore: No.

Q23 Mr Touhig: You mentioned earlier about careers advice but careers advice is often too late, is it not, to help young people?
Mr Watmore: Which is why one of the areas we are moving towards is trying to give advice and guidance across a whole range of topics, including access to university and further education at a much younger age. If we can get to the kids at key stage two time, primary and secondary school time, the evidence suggests that it is at that point that their aspirations shift.

Q24 Mr Touhig: I understand that point. The Report deals with widening participation in higher education but we have no hope of doing that, have we, if we have groups of youngsters who do not have the basic educational qualifications to get into university? Are we looking in the wrong direction? I appreciate this might be outside the immediate orbit of your department but are we looking in the wrong direction in finding how we can improve access into higher education? If we do not look at the kids who lack the basic qualifications, then we are not going to make any progress whatsoever.
Mr Watmore: I think I would agree with you that there is a strong linkage between attainment at school level and entering into the system. What we do not want to do is to go for under achieving people to get them into university. What we want to do is to raise their aspirations so that they get the same levels of achievement. When you look at the attainment levels by different groups—particularly gender, ethnicity and so on—and it you subdivide it, you do see variations. The problem group, as we keep coming back to, is what is commonly known as

white working class boys. It is in that territory that most of the action needs to be focused and now to get their attainment—

Q25 Mr Touhig: I think we are on the same wave length. I am just not sure how are we doing it. I certainly do not want to do anybody out of a job, least of all Sir Martin who I have never seen before today, but if we really want to improve our chances of getting young people into university and giving them opportunities should we not be concentrating resources more on getting them the basic educational qualifications rather than bothering about an Office for Fair Access?
Sir Martin Harris: Can I suggest that it is both and I think we must be careful we do not set up a dichotomy here that is not appropriate. Of course, a great deal of responsibility lies in schools to raise aspirations. That is absolutely right and that is not our primary focus today, but it would be quite wrong to ignore what universities can do by looking backwards, as it were, into schools, by having outreach, by having summer courses, by having mentoring. All of these things are moving in the same direction. We have to raise aspiration because only by raising aspiration can we get people into the pool of applicants.

Q26 Mr Touhig: I understand that and I think you are right. I agree with you there. You have said it is not what we are looking at today but according to your website your aims and objectives support, encourage and improve participation rates and higher education rates for lower income and other under represented groups.
Sir Martin Harris: Yes. What I was trying to suggest was that, while I do think universities and comparable institutions have a significant role in this field, I was arguing it is complimentary to our role that falls in the school sector and the two have to work together. There are increasing signs that they are. For example, the gift and talent scheme is based in schools and helps to produce young people who are then equipped to apply for the universities that we are talking about.

Q27 Mr Touhig: In answer to the Chairman you also mentioned about more local places. On page ten of the Report at (d) it says: "The availability of higher education is limited in some locations, which may restrict opportunities for individuals from under represented groups to participate." What are you doing about that? What are we doing as a country to try and make sure that people do have easier access? My own youngest daughter preferred to live at home when she went to university. Not everybody does but in her case that is what she wanted.
Mr Watmore: That is a very significant point. The mental image lots of people have is that going to university is a three year rite of passage where you leave home and so on. Increasingly, that is not the case for a large number of people in this country and therefore what the department is trying to do, working with colleagues here and in the wider university sector, is to get university provision more local to more people. There are two ways primarily of doing that. One is working with the FE sector and further education colleges.

Q28 Mr Touhig: Creating a learning campus?
Mr Watmore: Yes. The second is the policy that we launched—I am guessing now—six months ago which we called our new university challenge, which was to allow areas of the country to bid to have the higher education provision extended to their locality.

Q29 Mr Touhig: Through a further education college or something like that?
Mr Watmore: Yes, or whatever is the right mechanism. It could even be done in conjunction with the regional development agency.

Q30 Mr Touhig: Do you have a map of those areas of the country where we really need to concentrate?
Mr Watmore: I think from memory we identified up to 20 that we would consider and then it is for people to come forward from those areas.

Q31 Mr Touhig: Do you have a timetable for implementing that?
Mr Watmore: Yes. I do not have the exact answer in my head.
Professor Eastwood: There is consultation which is closing this month on the new university challenge and we will publish our response to that consultation in December. We do have maps of participation. We have identified what we call HE cold spots.

Q32 Mr Touhig: Could you let us have a note on that perhaps?[1] It might be helpful to us.
Professor Eastwood: We could indeed.

Q33 Mr Touhig: On page 11 of the Report at paragraph 1.4 it says: "Social class remains a strong determinant of higher education participation with the proportion from lower socio-economic backgrounds having remained largely static over the past five years." That is nothing for us to be proud of, is it? It has not moved in the last five years.
Mr Watmore: I think the Report quite helpfully points out other areas where the gap has closed.

Q34 Mr Touhig: Let us look at what we have here. For that group it has not really moved for the last five years.
Mr Watmore: I think that is the point I have been trying to make. For a particular subset of the white working class, it is our problem area.

Q35 Mr Touhig: How do we combat this? You talked earlier about raising aspiration. I visited a school in my constituency a while ago and the head said to me, "Do you know, Don, when I came here nobody expected anything of me because no one in the village had ever gone to university and the

[1] Ev 19

attitude was university is not for the likes of us. I said to a mother the other week, 'Work with me. Your child is going to university', and she said, 'You are off your bloody head.'" He said, "The child is intelligent, inquisitive, articulate and if the mother and family work with me by the time that child goes to comprehensive school that child is on his way to university." I just talk about poverty of ambition in the Welsh context but clearly from this Report we have this poverty of ambition across the whole of England as well.

Mr Watmore: I think your anecdote is a very good illustration of the wider challenge which is what many of the programmes we are representing here today have been set up to try and deal with. If the aspiration is raised, then usually the attainment follows and, when the attainment follows, the application to university can be successful.

Q36 Mr Touhig: Do you have a strategy for trying to raise that interest and encourage that aspiration?

Professor Eastwood: If you look at what the individual universities are doing through their own programmes and through their own student volunteering and mentoring schemes, and you put that alongside initiatives such as Aim Higher, which both work with young people in schools but also offer them taster courses and expose them to something of the university experience, you can begin to see as these initiatives come together that we have a multiple strategy for dealing with precisely the kind of matter that you are talking about.

Q37 Mr Touhig: On page 39 at 4.8 it says: "Our survey found that a lack of family expectation or tradition of higher education involvement is particularly significant." Understanding mentoring, understanding raising aspirations, how do we actually get it across to working-class families that this is a great opportunity? I come from a mining background where education was a passport out of poverty. How do we really ignite that excitement and interest about what education can do for kids?

Sir Martin Harris: Many of the university outreach programmes critically involve both teachers and parents in what they do. If one is going to succeed in what you are seeking to achieve—and all of us likewise—we must also try to raise that interest with parents and teachers so that young people with the aptitude can be motivated and their aspiration can be raised. It is very much a team effort.

Q38 Mr Touhig: If you have an example of good practice, do you try to spread that?

Sir Martin Harris: Certainly.

Q39 Angela Browning: You have not mentioned foundation degrees. If we look at page 32, I was quite interested in the role foundation degrees play in attracting those cross sections of socio-economic groups that the Report is concerned about. I wonder whether you feel you will meet your target by 2010 for 100,000 learners coming through a foundation course.

Professor Eastwood: We are confident that we are on course to meet that target, yes.

Q40 Angela Browning: It says in the Report that they were mainly people over 21. One can understand why that is but in terms of the total time it takes them to achieve their degree—I see 54% went on to obtain their degree—how does this age group cope with this extra time of learning financially?

Professor Eastwood: A number of them undertake their learning part-time rather than full-time so that is part of the answer. What has been very interesting about foundation degrees is precisely that they have reached out to the type of student who perhaps hitherto had not thought of her or himself as a higher education student. They are generally work-based in terms of the mode of delivery and they are also delivered, in the main, close to home so the issue about travel to study and so forth is diminished. Certainly when I go to foundation degree forward conferences, for example, you hear wonderful and heart warming stories of people whose lives have been transformed, who have managed to work through a period of juggling all manner of things in order to transform their lives. What is interesting about foundation degrees is that they often become very strong ambassadors for the concept and to encourage other kinds of learners into those programmes.

Q41 Angela Browning: Looking at some of the Report here around page 32, things like veterinary medicine and dentistry are out to this group of students, are they not?

Professor Eastwood: Yes, they are, though in a number of the therapies what we are finding with foundation degrees is people like dental assistants and so forth might come down a foundation degree route, various kinds of veterinary assistants and so forth. What we are seeing is that foundation degrees are skilling a number of the people around those professions; but you are quite right, it does not lead to the licence to practise as a vet.

Q42 Angela Browning: You do not see this as a pathway to them achieving those higher academic qualifications?

Professor Eastwood: Those are certainly not closed to them. For example, if you take medicine, there is great attraction to medicine so if someone were to come for a foundation degree and then to translate that into a full, traditional honours degree, if they are appropriately qualified, they could move forward. Although there may be some people who come down that route, I think they would be the exception rather than the rule.

Q43 Angela Browning: Could I just ask you about those who fall by the wayside? If we look at page 38, we see the difficulties of those who are unplaced UCAS applicants. Box 19 goes into a little more detail about this. It does seem to me rather fundamental and basic that some of their problems were that they felt they did not get the right advice

and guidance, particularly at school level. From what we read in box 19, it is not just that they did not attain the academic attainment needed but some of them were going in the wrong direction. For example, it says, " . . . advice on which GCSEs to take or where a language or a science was required." It does seem tragic that it is only at the point at which they make a UCAS application that they discover they have been taking the wrong examinations at school and doing the wrong courses. Surely, that is something that can and should be addressed as a matter of urgency?

Professor Eastwood: I think there are two issues here. One we have already touched on which is advice and guidance in schools. I think we are all in agreement that some young people are failed quite early on in the system by, as you are indicating, inappropriate advice and guidance. Certainly one of the things we are working with universities to do is to ensure that there is great clarity around the entrance requirements to programmes and so forth. The other issue which I think is interesting in the case of box 19 is applicants who come into the UCAS system perhaps inappropriately advised. Colleagues in UCAS are doing things to enhance the flexibility of UCAS, notably for example with UCAS Extra. Now an applicant who comes into the system, makes his or her five applications and does not get an offer can remain in the system and make additional choices and can switch tack from advice that they might then be getting from institutions. I do not say that is a sufficient response to this concern but what it does demonstrate is increasing flexibility to try to accommodate those students who may not have gone into the system with the most appropriate advice.

Q44 Nigel Griffiths: Table 16 on page 44 gives a list of all the institutions that seem for one reason or another either reluctant or unable to take substantial amounts of children from state schools where the majority of children go. My calculation is that some 17 of them get the five bad star rating. Cambridge does not fall into that because they apparently could not supply you with data. We will come back to that but it is an interesting set of tables. If I look at the Royal Academy of Music, I can perhaps understand that specialist music schools supply children there but under it is the Royal Agricultural College. Why would that get the five stars?

Professor Eastwood: I think it is fair to say that the Royal Agricultural College has a particular pattern of provision that appeals to students of particular backgrounds. If you were looking at for example provision in the land based subjects, you might want to look at applications to the RAC alongside applications to Harper Adams. If you look at those two excellent institutions, you will see that there is relatively balanced provision as between the two.

Q45 Nigel Griffiths: Surely people interested in agriculture come from quite a few backgrounds? Why would we expect the Royal Agricultural College to apparently discriminate against state schools?

Professor Eastwood: It is not a matter of discriminating against any particular school or kind of applicant. It is about the pool of applicants that the RAC has.

Q46 Nigel Griffiths: Let us choose another one then: the London School of Economics and Political Science or the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Do they fit what seems to me to be—if you will forgive me—a prejudiced point of view?

Professor Eastwood: If you are looking at a number of these institutions, you need to look at the particular kind of subject mix that they have. One of the issues—it is not the only issue—explains why the Russell Group is where it is. If you look at the provision in the Russell Group institutions, they are the predominant providers of science, engineering and medicine programmes. They are the predominant providers of modern languages and we know that there is a particular distribution of those subjects in schools and between the sectors. We would not want to do things which had the unintended consequence of diminishing the number of science and modern languages places.

Q47 Nigel Griffiths: Why was Cambridge allowed not to make a return on that or on social class or indeed on anything else in 2005/6?

Professor Eastwood: The issue with the Cambridge data return was that there were problems with the data return. The data return was therefore not fit for purpose at the date when it should have been returned and therefore—

Q48 Nigel Griffiths: Let me just stop you there. You are telling us that they had no problems in 2002, 2003 and 2004 but suddenly in 2005. What did you do about it?

Professor Eastwood: It was a problem with the quality of the data. It was not a problem with what was happening in the institution.

Q49 Nigel Griffiths: How do you know, if the data was unreliable, that it was telling you that the institution was perfect?

Professor Eastwood: We are not saying that the institution was perfect. It is simply an absence of data for that year. It is a technical issue. Institutions have to make their data returns by a particular date and the University of Cambridge had not done so.

Q50 Nigel Griffiths: Why did you not just accept the data at some date and then build it into this table?

Professor Eastwood: Because we require institutions to return by a particular date and if we do not hold them to that and we publish late then all institutions will send in their data late.

Q51 Nigel Griffiths: Do you get individual college returns from Cambridge?

Professor Eastwood: No.

Q52 Nigel Griffiths: I think that might be useful because I am told that St John's College takes up to 70% and perhaps more from state schools but the others do not. After admission and selection, they are all pooled in terms of going to the same lectures.
Professor Eastwood: As far as the Funding Council is concerned, our relationship is with the university. The university has relationships with its colleges.

Q53 Nigel Griffiths: What requirement is there? I see from 2.6 on page 18 that institutions get grants to encourage access. Does the Russell Group get a fair proportion of those grants?
Professor Eastwood: It gets its proportion allocated on the formula, yes.

Q54 Nigel Griffiths: Statistically, it gets it according to what? What is the formula?
Professor Eastwood: It is a slightly complicated formula.

Q55 Nigel Griffiths: Let me just ask you a question that might help. Does the formula go out of its way to say to the Russell Group, "Actually, we want to give you lots of money to encourage participation" because the general public and committees like the Committee of Public Accounts are concerned that you are not doing even more to attract people?
Professor Eastwood: The formula reflects the additional costs of recruiting and delivering higher education to widening participation students. That is the purpose of our widening participation funding but that needs to sit alongside the other funding which is available, funding which universities invest themselves as a result of their agreements with the Office of Fair Access. In the case of almost all Russell Group institutions, they make investments in widening participation over and above widening participation income and the income they have agreed with OFFA to spend.

Q56 Nigel Griffiths: Martin, is the funding for this skewed in any way in favour of Russell Group institutions?
Sir Martin Harris: The funding that David has just spoken about is formulaic. It is not skewed one way or another. What varies is that universities have agreed access agreements which vary according to the amount of money they have chosen to put into bursary schemes and also into other forms of outreach.

Q57 Nigel Griffiths: Is there evidence that for instance Sheffield, which seems to have an excellent record both in getting people who have had no previous participation or are mature as well as from state schools, gets more of this funding than the next one up, Oxford?
Sir Martin Harris: It will get more because it has more. It is *pro rata,* is it not, David? If Sheffield gets more students from those particular socio-economic groups, then it will get more of the access. It is precisely calculated in that way.

Q58 Nigel Griffiths: What is the incentive for Oxford then to outbid Sheffield for that money? Is there one?
Sir Martin Harris: The incentive is there to reflect higher costs of recruiting, retaining and encouraging into the labour market students from these difficult backgrounds. The incentive for any university to engage in this activity is that every university wants to be able to choose from amongst the ablest applicants. The wheel has come full circle. We are back to saying the crucial thing is to get the brightest young people into the pool of applicants for the universities for which they are best qualified.

Q59 Nigel Griffiths: I am not sure that Oxford does not feel it can do that without any help or intervention from anyone else. It just so happens it possibly discriminates against mature students and kids from lower participation. I do not want to single out Oxford because it is not the worst.
Sir Martin Harris: My argument would be that it is not a question of discrimination. It is a question of universities being rewarded *inter alia* for their success in this particular respect and then universities choosing which additional funds of their own to put in to supplement the efforts that are funded by the formula that David referred to.

Q60 Nigel Griffiths: It seems to be inadequate. In 2.8 on page 19, the requirement for strategies and action plans for these universities was withdrawn. Who was at the forefront? Which universities were at the forefront of lobbying against that?
Sir Martin Harris: I think it is an interesting piece of history. You will recall that it was highly controversial when this legislation was enacted.

Q61 Nigel Griffiths: I bet it was.
Sir Martin Harris: One of the many conditions of the legislation was that there should be no increase in bureaucracy. Since it was clear there would need to be new agreements called access agreements, part of the understanding at the time was that certain other forms of information would no longer be collected. As you heard earlier from the Permanent Secretary, all of us have come to the view that that should be re-established so we have a clear, total view of what universities are doing to encourage widening participation and fair access, including the financial packages they have put in place.

Q62 Nigel Griffiths: Does 2.8 now mean that the next time you come before this Committee there will be lots of information on how much they spend on widening participation and how they distribute their funding?
Professor Eastwood: Sir Martin and I have been, at the Secretary of State's behest, consulting and advising the Secretary of State on the way forward. We gave him our advice last month. Our advice is that comprehensive widening participation strategies should be a requirement. They should be a requirement of the receipt of our funding. In so far as any additional burden is welcomed in the sector, that has been welcomed for precisely the reason you

are referring to, that this will enable universities to demonstrate the totality of what they do in terms of widening participation. So, yes indeed, when we have those widening participation strategies, we will be in a position where we have a much richer base of information to inform the sector, to inform this Committee and to inform others who have a particular interest in widening participation.

Q63 Nigel Griffiths: I am disappointed this has taken five years. 2.6 highlights the issues of the Funding Council not requiring institutions to report on how they spend their grants. Is that going to be addressed and is that not absolutely vital if you are going to showcase the institutions that have been successful in their strategies—I gather there have been no sanctions against those who have not been successful—and ensure that those who have not been successful must follow whatever guidelines and best practice are laid out?
Professor Eastwood: In the case of our widening participation premium, that currently stands at 95 million. That is a part of our total teaching funding grant which stands at 4.6 billion. It goes to institutions as block grant. What we are doing through the re-introduction of the widening participation strategy is creating a mechanism where universities can demonstrate to us how they invest that widening participation premium alongside other resources that they have available. Yes, we will get much greater clarity around the ways in which universities invest in widening participation but nevertheless we remain committed as a Funding Council to funding on the basis of transparently constructed block grant.

Q64 Chairman: Mr Griffiths' question was very important. Have I got this right? You are saying that Oxford University is not discriminating at all. They are simply taking the best. If that is true, is it because Mr Watmore is not delivering you the best, particularly from white working class groups for instance? You cannot have it both ways. There must be something wrong with the system somewhere.
Sir Martin Harris: I think all of us are saying in effect the same thing which is that it is very important to work together with schools and universities to ensure that those who are qualified enter into the pool of applicants for universities for which they are academically and in other ways qualified. We need to continue to develop the outreach programmes, both in schools and from universities into schools, to ensure that nobody with the requisite ability fails to enter the application pool.

Q65 Chairman: That leads straight to Professor Eastwood. Look at this table on page 44. Look at the University of Birmingham. There is nothing but red or grey dots. Remind us who is going to become vice-chancellor of Birmingham in April.
Professor Eastwood: I gather that Professor Eastwood will take over from Professor Sterling as vice-chancellor in April and will happily answer questions about the University of Birmingham from April.

Q66 Chairman: Before then you are not prepared to say anything about Birmingham?
Professor Eastwood: I think others are better placed to comment on the University of Birmingham than I am.

Q67 Chairman: You must have some aspirations though for taking over the job?
Professor Eastwood: I do indeed.

Q68 Chairman: What are your aspirations for widening participation at the University of Birmingham?
Professor Eastwood: My aspirations are to continue to build the University of Birmingham as a model civic and international university.

Q69 Chairman: You cannot do any worse than they are doing already, can you, in this field?
Professor Eastwood: If you look at what the University of Birmingham has done in terms of its widening participation strategy, in terms of its compact arrangements with schools, in many ways it is a model of how universities can—

Q70 Chairman: Why are there nothing but red and grey dots here then?
Professor Eastwood: There is another issue about Russell Group institutions in particular. Many of them, through their compact arrangements, through their outreach into schools, are doing things and making interventions, raising aspirations which other universities in due course will benefit from. We should not see a one to one relationship. What is interesting about a lot of Russell Group institutions is that they invest very heavily in widening participation to the benefit of the sector as a whole rather than just to the benefit of those institutions.

Q71 Angela Browning: Professor Eastwood, because of my concerns about the information in box 19, you were explaining to me how the UCAS system is flexible enough to assist applicants in the future. What I was really concerned about was why the information in box 19 flags up some pretty fundamental things earlier in education that could easily be avoided. I was a little concerned at an answer Mr Watmore gave to an earlier question. I may have misunderstood the intonation in Mr Watmore's voice, but I rather got the impression that this was not your departmental brief and therefore somehow you were sort of distancing yourself from it. It does seem to me that when these things are identified somebody has to take ownership of sorting them.
Mr Watmore: I think Mr Touhig asked a specific question around qualifications at GCSE level, which is not primarily our department's responsibility.

What I went on to say was that raising aspiration for university and other sectors obviously starts at school so we have a great deal of interest in how that goes.

Q72 Angela Browning: Thank you for that. Presumably also, to address some of these very clear problems identified in box 19, if you go across the page to page 39, 4.11, at the bottom of that paragraph we also see something which is concerning which affects schools and attitudes to children in schools. This is about the impact of student finances. In 4.10 above it, we see that generally the information in this Report shows that the various institutions and the Funding Council analysis do not believe that the impact of student finance changes on applications is really pertinent in this; and yet further down in 4.11 worryingly it says: "The mismatch between these views and our other sources of evidence suggests that teaching staff, who may be advising young people, may not be fully aware of the financial support that is available to students or may have inaccurate understanding of young people's concerns." Is it really right that those who are giving advice in schools on which course to take, whether a language or a science subject is needed and also obviously covering this very sensitive issue of what it is all going to cost, are not up to speed with this?
Mr Watmore: Clearly the concern when the legislation was passed in 2004 was that the introduction of tuition fees in particular and the general cost of going to university would put students off in large numbers. That has not been the case. Year on year we have had a rise in applications across the board so in the generality we are continuing to see more and more young people wanting to come through to university. Specifically, however, when you get into small groups of people from particular backgrounds, a number of factors can be the final influence on them as to which way they jump on any particular decision. Some aspects of it concern the financial issues and that is where we needed to get the understanding, not just with teachers but with parents, with responsible adults and indeed, as you know with most young people today, they reflex to the web if they want to get any advice. We need to make sure that there is clear information on that which is something that we are doing with the student loan campaign to try and improve clarity and accessibility of information about student finance.

Q73 Angela Browning: The generation of people who are teaching in our schools and giving this advice, having these conversations with the children in the schools, is a generation who did not pay tuition fees themselves. Do you think that influences how they then present this to the people they are advising?
Mr Watmore: I have been in this particular job for just over a year. One of the things that quite strikes me is how a large number of people think the university system is today as it was when they went through it. This must apply to the teaching staff which is why we are particularly keen to get people who are in the system today directly talking to the people who aspire to be in the system, whether that be through students going back to schools or younger teachers or whatever, as well as the general advice and guidance to teachers, responsible adults and students across the web.

Q74 Angela Browning: Could I just ask one general question which is not flagged up in this Report but which I do believe holds back certain students from having access to higher education? It is generally recognised that within the education system, within the school system, dyslexia is not identified early enough or formally enough. I was talking recently to somebody who actually takes children who have applied to go to university, but who have dyslexia in some form or another, in order to see what can be done to facilitate them entering university and being able to cope. I just wonder if you have any thoughts on that and whether it is a problem for the university system that so many children are coming out of education with dyslexia but not with a formal diagnosis and that affects their learning at university.
Professor Eastwood: Having a wife who specialises in this and two dyslexic children, I have a certain sympathy for the question. I am far from being an expert but my sense is that schools are getting better at identifying and, where appropriate, statementing dyslexic students. I think it actually goes back to the advice and guidance issues that you have been flagging. A number of students who know that they have particular learning needs—dyslexia may be one of them—identify institutions which have particular strengths in those areas. I do think over the last five years universities have become increasingly clear in flagging up at open days, in prospectuses and in other information the kind of support which is available to students who have particular learning needs. I think there is a journey still to travel but I think we are embarked on it.

Q75 Mr Mitchell: The government told us when we introduced these fees that they were justified by the fact that kids who went to university would have higher earnings later on. Does that differential still maintain?
Mr Watmore: It does.

Q76 Mr Mitchell: Is it as high as it was?
Mr Watmore: It is reckoned to be north of £100,000 net of tax so it is sizeable.

Q77 Mr Mitchell: You have not done that analysis by subject and by university, have you? If I went to one university, I would have lower earnings probably or if I did palaeontology or whatever.
Mr Watmore: The statistic is clearly an average and it matters massively what jobs people do subsequently. Some people until quite recently

earned a lot of money in the City on the back of whatever. Other people might earn a lot less having pursued very notable careers.

Q78 Mr Mitchell: Why do you not publish the figures by university or by subject?
Professor Eastwood: The data are published by subject.

Q79 Mr Mitchell: Do you expect the coming recession to have an effect on university recruitment? Is it going to make people more likely to go to university?
Mr Watmore: We are looking at this, as you might expect currently, whatever form the economic downturn might take, including whether it turns out to be a recession or not. The normal history of these things which we think will apply—but we cannot be certain—is that in an economic downturn more people apply to university and more people stay for longer. I think that is quite natural if we think about normal behaviour. If you were an 18 year old today, you might think for all sorts of reasons that the university option was a good one for the next three years. What I think is undoubtedly true is that in all economic cycles young people have much greater belief that university is a good place for them than probably was the case in my day, when I was thinking about applying to universities in the 1970s. The evidence we have is that more than half of young people do think university will be a good option for them.

Q80 Mr Mitchell: But they are not doing it in terms of being able to earn more later. As Sir Martin says, it is not primarily an economic motive and I think that is probably true, certainly in my case. It was to escape from life in the real world a bit longer, but is a recession going to increase the economic imperative?
Mr Watmore: We can imagine that more people will apply to university in the first place. We would imagine that more people will apply to do fourth and fifth years or whatever, and we also believe people will think it more important to have a qualification because if the job market tightens from their point of view, in other words, it becomes an employer's market rather than an employee's market as it has been for the last few years, then a qualification in an appropriate subject could be a distinguishing factor. One of the pieces of advice we are trying to give as a department is not just to go to university or further education but also to orient the subject towards something that you think will both interest you and be useful long term, and the so-called STEM subjects are the ones that we usually reflex to where we have—forgive the pun—stem "sells"; in other words, it is to focus people's mental attitude that if they are doing science, technology and maths-type subjects that will help them sell themselves in a career.

Q81 Mr Mitchell: The description in the report of all the different methods, bursaries, institutions, trying to increase participation gets very confusing. I went into Franklin College, the local sixth form college, and they had got a lot more information than they had when I was at school, but some of it is just kind of advertising slush—"If you go to Bermondsey you will get more birds and beer" and that kind of stuff. All these are really a gilt on everything, are they not, to try and attenuate the effects of the imposition of fees in the first place?
Mr Watmore: I have two sons. One is in his first year of university, one is in his second, and they said that they have both had a variety of sources of information, but one of the things that we continue to find is that feedback from other students at the universities on a combination of subjects and lifestyle continue to be the major reasons why some people make their decisions, but lots of other people make their decisions on a whole variety of other characteristics.

Q82 Mr Mitchell: But why should you have such a criss-crossing, every institution left to do what it wants, and they are left to spend the money how they want? Why should we not have a common system of provision of information, provision of bursaries, so that you have got one bursary system, not everybody doling out a little bit here and a little bit there, and the picture becoming enormously confusing for the kids?
Mr Watmore: On the bursary scheme I will let Martin answer.
Sir Martin Harris: Young people have always had to choose between different campuses; they have always had to choose between—

Q83 Mr Mitchell: But it has never been as confusing as it is now.
Sir Martin Harris: Let me home in on your particular question. A decision was taken quite explicitly four years ago that universities would make their own arrangements in respect of financial support and that has been hugely to students' benefit; I have been looking for an opportunity to say that. What the government of the day expected in terms of bursary support from institutions and what has actually emerged have been substantially better for students than had there been a blanket national scheme.

Q84 Mr Mitchell: Why? How do I know where to apply for and where I am going to get most money?
Sir Martin Harris: If you can find out what the campus is like, what the social life is like, what the academic courses are like, it is in exactly the same place that you can find out the financial support that is available to you in that institution, and the fact is that students can find these things out and do find these things out. The point I was trying to make is that it does vary because different universities have adopted different methodologies to encourage young people to come to their institutions. Personally, I think that has enriched our sector.

Q85 Mr Mitchell: But we had one system of bursaries and you knew if you went to university you would get whatever was proportionate to your parents' income at every institution.
Sir Martin Harris: There are two levels, are there not? There is the national scheme, where the government of the day makes the decision about what is the appropriate minimum support that a student, given income, should have. Over and above that universities provide their own system of bursary support and these are tailored to the needs of that institution. These are the students who go to that institution. They may have a regional bias, they may be biased towards those who find it most difficult to access university in their area. If there had been one national scheme all that variation would not have come into being and I think we would all have been the poorer for it.

Q86 Mr Mitchell: There is an interesting statement in 1.8 in the report, "Two-thirds of those with five or more GCSEs are in higher education by age 19 . . . ", in other words, the able take care of themselves more or less, so the problem therefore comes down to the 20% of pupils who live in the most deprived wards. They make up only 11% of those who attain five or more GCSEs. Do those people in those deprived wards who attain the five GCSEs have an equal chance of getting to university, do equal proportions of them go to university as do in the better areas?
Sir Martin Harris: When you compare attainment with attainment there is not a problem. The problem is how—
Mr Mitchell: I have got five GCSEs and I live in Nunsthorpe in Grimsby. Is my chance of getting to university as good as Jack Bloggs's in one of these posh London suburbs?

Q87 Chairman: Who are you pointing to, by the way?
Professor Eastwood: The data show that if you are in education beyond level 2, beyond 16, and you come from the bottom quintile, the bottom 20%, your chances of going to higher education are marginally higher.

Q88 Mr Mitchell: What is the margin?
Professor Eastwood: In terms of your chances of proceeding to higher education? I cannot remember the figure off the top of my head.

Q89 Mr Mitchell: But since the problem is more severe in the most deprived areas and the weakest schools, would it not be better to concentrate the resources and the advice and the information in those areas and those people and for government, rather than a haphazard pattern of universities doing it, to put in advisers to encourage people in those schools in those areas?
Professor Eastwood: It is common ground that it is that transition beyond level 2 that we need to focus on, but I think it is a question of both. There are the range of activities that Sir Martin was referring to, but if you look at Aim Higher, which is directly funded by the department and funded by us, a part of the Aim Higher funding goes directly to schools, a part of the Aim Higher funding goes to Aim Higher partnerships into a range of activities, but—

Q90 Mr Mitchell: Which schools do you concentrate it on?
Professor Eastwood: Increasingly two things are happening with Aim Higher. One is that it is becoming increasingly well targeted, and that was something that Bill Rammell was very keen on when he was minister of state in Ian's department. The second thing that we are doing with Aim Higher funding as we go forward is ensuring that we work with young people at an increasingly early stage so that the interventions are not interventions post-16 but interventions much earlier.
Mr Watmore: You saw the report earlier this month, I think, from the National Council for Education and Excellence. This is a big part of that report and there are a lot of recommendations in there that we need to absorb and take on board. Secondly, I know DCSF—and you would need to ask them for more detail on this—are beginning their Pathfinder scheme at around Key Stage 2 time, so at age 11/12 time, in order to get children more focused on university careers. You do not get them if you wait until 16. The ones that have got through that far then go on to progress but you have lost so many on the way and it is getting them at an earlier age that is key.
Sir Martin Harris: One promising initiative in DCSF is precisely putting schools in families so that the knowledge that exists in some schools can be shared among all the schools in a group so that young people can get academic guidance, financial guidance, all the things that you are rightly concerned about, regardless of the precise school they go to. I think that has great promise.

Q91 Mr Mitchell: That is a good thing; that is commendable. You said in answer to Mr Touhig that you wanted to spread out the universities so that areas which did not have a university had access and that would be a first-fit description of Grimsby where the nearest university is Hull or Lincoln. I assume it is a deterrent if there is not a local university on marginal cases who might well go to university, so what is the answer to that? What are you doing there? Is it a question of setting up universities or setting up out-centres, such as in Lancashire, which the report says has done a lot, in centres like Grimsby?
Professor Eastwood: The first thing we need to establish is that there is indeed what we would describe as latent demand, that is to say young people who would proceed to higher education if only it were delivered in a different way or more locally, so it has to be evidenced. The second is then to look at what is the most appropriate way of delivering it. For example, in Grimsby, where you have a very strong FE college with increasingly good links between the FE college and the university the other side of the bridge, that creates the mechanism

into which you can think about making investments and, as Ian was saying, often enriching the further education college by enabling it appropriately to deliver higher education is the best way of making a swift impact. However, if you were to look at, say, Barnsley, what we have done in Barnsley is work with the University of Huddersfield to establish a discrete, small, higher education centre in Barnsley which sits opposite the FE college but is linked to the University of Huddersfield. There are different mechanisms. We first want to establish that there is real latent demand and, secondly, we then work with local providers and, as Ian was saying, other local partners and investors, to find the most appropriate model.

Q92 Mr Curry: Sir Martin, the families who come from the most deprived wards are most likely, as well as low educational achievement, to be on welfare, they are the least likely to have easy links to jobs, and they probably have the most dislocated family structures; that is true, is it not?
Sir Martin Harris: There are clear correlations.

Q93 Mr Curry: That being the case, is there a ceiling on your endeavours? Is there a percentage of people you manage to reach out to in this group which represents the maximum reasonable capture, as it were, of people into higher education?
Sir Martin Harris: I would like to look at it from bottom up rather than top down, that is to say, I think what we have to continue to do is focus on ensuring that all those who do have the aptitude have an opportunity, whether that is through enriching the school that they are in and the links or by the geographical spread that we have just been talking about. I cannot conceive that there is any *a priori* maximum. What I can see is that some students have greater difficulty in realising their aptitudes than others and that is what we are going to focus on.

Q94 Mr Curry: A huge amount of research is quite often done in demonstrating that children from middle-class backgrounds tend to do better or have more opportunity than children from working-class backgrounds and I have never understood why anybody does not regard this as so blindingly obvious why do we need to spend a king's ransom in working it out, but would you expect then at some stage children from middle-class and working-class families to be sending the same proportion of their children to university?
Sir Martin Harris: I could not answer that. What I do think is clear, and David used the phrase just now, is that there still is latent demand of young people who are not getting the same opportunities as others to develop their talents and that is what I am charged with trying to minimise. You will never eliminate it but we can certainly minimise it.

Q95 Mr Curry: If we look at schools, of course, we find they vary absolutely hugely. If you break down the A-Cs then you will find some areas where they are very low performance. I do not want to sound elitist about it but a GCSE at C level has never struck me as qualifying you to be an Einstein in the first place, quite honestly. Some of these exams are of extraordinarily low quality to start with. In addition to perhaps a lack of aspiration from the parents do you find that in some of these schools the teachers themselves seem to be unwilling to direct pupils towards, I was going to say the better universities but shall we say the more well-known universities?
Sir Martin Harris: Let me put that the other way round. I do think that in our outreach and activities, as well as looking at the young people themselves, it is important that teachers and parents are fully aware of how the university system now is. Ian said earlier that there is a memory very often of what universities were like 30 or 40 years ago, an accurate memory.

Q96 Mr Curry: But it is more than a memory, it is more than an awareness. Is it not the case that in some teachers there is almost an unwillingness to want the children to go to these universities so they are fighting a class war over them; there is still an argument that they do not want them to go there? We have had occasional instances, have we not, profile cases, and what emerged was that there was simply no support in schools to try and persuade the children to aspire high?
Sir Martin Harris: It is very important that the schools do encourage and that they offer a curriculum that enables young people to choose the range of options that at 16-plus and again at 18-plus they have available.

Q97 Mr Curry: Because if this were not the case then you would not have the stories, again quite high profile, of parents going to quite extraordinary lengths to get themselves into a catchment area of good schools, to the extent of inventing addresses or choosing to have their children intensively tutored, which, of course, if you have non-verbal reasoning tests to get into a school, lends itself to tuition much more than being based on traditional academic testing, and I am of sufficient generation to have had that in my background. That shows there are not enough good schools around, does it not?
Sir Martin Harris: What I take you to be saying is that some parents are better able to help their children's aspirations. What we are trying to do is provide ways in which we can complement those parental aspirations.

Q98 Mr Curry: Do you applaud those parents or condemn them?
Sir Martin Harris: I think every parent will try and do the best he or she can for their children.

Q99 Mr Curry: We have had a lot of discussion about exams and university vice chancellors have said that they often face the problem of having to teach basic skills to undergraduates when they first arrive in the university. Do you think that it might help children from deprived backgrounds if, for

example, there were not such a reliance on coursework where a lot of help is given at home or where it is more likely to benefit homes which have computers and are on the internet? Is there not a case for saying that some of the old-fashioned disciplines benefit children from deprived backgrounds more than the internet age?

Sir Martin Harris: I think you are leading on to territory which is outside my remit. What I would say is that we do believe that every young person, whatever course they go to, needs to be following a course for which they are properly equipped, and that I think is common ground.

Q100 Mr Curry: I am really reverting back to my first question. I share your aspiration that any child who is capable of sustaining a university course ought to be given the opportunity to do so but we all know that some start a long way behind the starting line because of the backgrounds they come from. We know equally that it is much more likely to find households which are internet literate in certain groups than it is in other groups and much more familiar with using it. Coursework does lend itself to being helped at home. You are saying responsible and concerned parents --- of course they are going to help their child. They would be failing if they did not help their child.

Sir Martin Harris: Let me go back to something David said because I think it is absolutely crucial to this whole debate, and that is that once people go on at the age of 16 their chances are as equal as we can make them, but what we have to be absolutely certain of is that in all our earlier educational processes there is a fair range of opportunities available to everyone and that is what we are all trying to bring about.

Professor Eastwood: It is probably worth just noting, because we will have a real-time experiment here, that the proportion of coursework in GCSE programmes is about to be reduced, so your hypothesis will in due course be tested.

Q101 Mr Curry: What proportion of students going to university has one or more parents who have been to university? Do we know?

Sir Martin Harris: I do not know the answer but it is the single biggest variable in determining whether somebody goes to university, whether one or more parents has been to university.

Q102 Mr Curry: So in those households which have no experience of going to university there is probably no experience of a role model getting an exam of any sort, to be blunt about it. What do we do to try and get that aspiration? Do we depend on the school to get that aspiration into a child? It is quite difficult to get the parent to do it, is it not, quite honestly, given the circumstances?

Sir Martin Harris: I think that is why we have all in different ways been talking about our partnerships between institutions, between universities and above all between the students of those universities and schools, precisely as one of the ways of trying to bring about what you are aspiring to, as we are.

Mr Watmore: We have not talked about the role of business in this. I used to sit on one of the employer-led sector skills councils with all the heads of IT; that was my thing, and we used to spend aeons worrying about these sorts of things as well as with the schools and the universities about how we could create not just the qualifications but also the environment in which more young people (in our case particularly we were aiming at a gender imbalance) could come through the system in order to pursue a career in our industry. I think it is much more than just parents. It is parents, it is teachers, it is responsible adults, it is role models in the local community, whatever they might be, it is business, it is all of us, in Parliament, in government, and it is information that is made available over the internet through the networks that increasingly young people rely on for their information sources. It is all of the above, and in order to meet your aspirational raising we have to find strategies that connect with all of those different routes.

Q103 Mr Curry: What is the drop-out rate at university? How does that range from the best to the worst?

Mr Watmore: I do not have the figure in my head as an absolute but what I know is that overall in completion rates at universities Britain is third best in the developed world.

Q104 Mr Curry: But there are some with quite significant drop-out rates, are there not?

Mr Watmore: With courses and individuals and so on, and, back to Mr Mitchell's question, we may well find there will be a shift in drop-outs as the economic thing unravels, but across the board we have raised participation and we have—

Q105 Mr Curry: The purpose of the question, which you no doubt get, is, is there any correlation between the universities with the highest rate of attracting people from deprived backgrounds into university courses and the levels of drop-out?[2]

Mr Watmore: I do not have that data in my head but I am pretty certain when I last looked at it that it was not the case.

Q106 Mr Curry: So that would not be the case?

Mr Watmore: No. If that is wrong, Mr Curry, I will correct it.

Mr Curry: I appreciate that. We are the Public Accounts Committee and at some stage one has inevitably got to ask oneself the question, what is the unit cost of getting somebody into university and sustaining the job in university and therefore being able to sustain—

Chairman: You can always do a note if you wish, if you do not have the answer.[3]

[2] Ev 20
[3] Ev 20

Q107 Mr Curry: I am saying that at some stage you have to look at what, if you like, the unit cost is and what the return on capital is. I am just trying to look at that.
Mr Watmore: Our overall strategy on volumes of graduates in the economy, if you like, is driven by Lord Leitch's report on skills for the 21st century. We have talked a lot about young people coming through the system into universities but we should also recognise that there are a lot of people of working age who have the potential to go to university which would benefit them and the economy.
Mr Curry: One final question: let us look at ethnic minorities. In general, the experience from America is that ethnic groups of Chinese origin—
Chairman: You are over time, Mr Curry, so perhaps you could do this by way of a note.
Mr Curry: Can I do a very crisp one because—
Chairman: It will have to be a very crisp answer too.

Q108 Mr Curry: What do you do in cultural groups where it is not the tradition for women to go to university or to play a leading role in community life? How do you deal with those situations?
Mr Watmore: A longer question, but in general our data is good on male, female and ethnicity. The white male is our problem, as I have said earlier. Specifically, you have to look at the local cultures. For example, going back to some of the questions that I think Mr Mitchell and Mr Touhig asked about, having local university access in places like Barnsley and Grimsby and so on will often help people from the local community enter the system who otherwise would not, and that may well include women from some ethnic backgrounds.

Q109 Mr Davidson: Can I just ask Sir Martin, following a point that Mr Curry made, if I heard you correctly you said that having had a parent at university was the most important determinant of whether or not somebody would go, and then, when asked if you had any figures on that, you said no. Did I hear correctly?
Sir Martin Harris: What I said was, and David will correct me if I am wrong, that the biggest single determinant of whether a young person goes to university or not is whether one or more parents went to university, but there are many other variants.

Q110 Mr Davidson: No, the single most important, that is right, and do you have any figures about how many people are at university just now in that position?
Sir Martin Harris: I do not have the figures but they do exist. They are available and we could certainly get them.

Q111 Mr Davidson: Could you maybe let us have that by categories and by institution and by social class? I think that would be very helpful for us.[4]

Professor Eastwood: Can I just make a comment on the data? As far as the data are concerned some fields are voluntary and that is one of the voluntary fields, so that limits the data capture.

Q112 Mr Davidson: It is the single most important category, criterion or determinant, we are told, and it is voluntary as to whether or not you fill it in? Okay, I understand that. Can I just clarify—
Professor Eastwood: That is because it is statutory to have it voluntary.

Q113 Mr Davidson: The way this works, you see, is that I ask you questions. You are all Oxbridge. Can I ask whether or not you all had a parent at university? No?
Mr Watmore: Medical students.

Q114 Mr Davidson: That is a "yes", then, is it?
Mr Watmore: Yes.
Professor Eastwood: One of two.
Mr Davidson: I just wanted to clarify that. In terms of the top ten staff in each of your departments, I think it would be helpful if you would give us a note telling us how many are in the same position, are from Oxbridge and had a parent who was at university just so that we can get a picture of the position in your departments, the extent to which you walk the walk.[5]
Chairman: Can you do that?

Q115 Mr Davidson: Of course they can. It should be easy enough.
Mr Watmore: I will get advice.
Mr Davidson: If the Army, the Air Force and the Navy can all do it I am sure the Department for Innovation can.

Q116 Chairman: The difficulty is knowing who are the top ten.
Mr Watmore: I was thinking that as well.
Mr Bacon: As long as Glasgow is one of them you will be fine.

Q117 Mr Davidson: Can I just clarify, Sir Martin, and you did very well earlier on, what you have got is obviously a key post in terms of being Director of the Office for Fair Access, but you are also the President of Clare College in Cambridge, you are also the Chancellor of Salford University, you are also a Director of the Universities Superannuation Scheme, you were the Deputy Chairman of the North West Development Agency for most of the year since you got this job. I understand, of course, that a man needs a hobby, but surely you cannot be devoting very much time to this and is that not an indication of the seriousness with which these issues are treated?
Sir Martin Harris: I think that this is anything but a hobby. This has been my position all through my career, that if there is one thing I really believe in it is equality of opportunity. That is why I went into

[4] Ev 20

[5] Ev 20

higher education, that is what I believe in, that is one of the things that this job was set up to achieve. It is just worth going back a little bit, is it not, and remembering that there was a genuine fear in many quarters that fees might deter young people from poorer families from going into higher education? One of the things I am proudest of over my four years is that that has not happened.

Q118 Mr Davidson: Okay. Nonetheless, you are doing 95 different jobs and in an important post like that should not somebody be focusing a bit more? Presumably running Salford University is your day job.
Sir Martin Harris: No. I am only Chancellor. That is an honorary title.

Q119 Mr Davidson: Oh, sorry, have you got a proper day job? What is your proper day job?
Sir Martin Harris: You might say I do not have one. This is a very important part of my life.

Q120 Mr Davidson: Can I turn to page 17 of the report where we are seeing, in terms of the number of youngsters who are at university and the socio-economic background, that for over a third, table 8, you do not have the statistics. That seems to me to be an indication that you do not take this all that seriously. You have collected the statistics from two-thirds; that is helpful, but the fact that you have not collected them or do not have them for a third means that everything that we are discussing here could just be way off beam. Mr Watmore, you presumably are responsible for that.
Mr Watmore: The statisticians in our department take the third and do not complete the form but they use other means.

Q121 Mr Davidson: How accurate then can we rely on these figures being?
Mr Watmore: Although you are right to point out the 30% gap, they regard these as statistically very acceptable figures.

Q122 Mr Davidson: Not having any return for 30%? We would not accept this from the CSA or for working families tax credits, to have a 30% gap.
Mr Watmore: They use other data that they have access to.

Q123 Mr Davidson: Okay. Can I ask whether or not the statistics, which we have got for England and Wales, as I understand it, as a whole are considerably different for different parts of England? Would it be fair to say that the percentage of white working-class youngsters from, say, the north west or the north east going on to higher and further education is greater or less than the south east? Is there any evidence of any of that?[6]

[6] Ev 20

Mr Watmore: My understanding is, and I will check this to make sure I have got it right afterwards and tell you if it is wrong, that at the regional level the variances are quite small but, like with a lot of statistics, whether it is crime stats or any of the others, you have to get down to quite local levels before you start to see that—

Q124 Mr Davidson: But what I want to know is, say, in the north east of England or the north west of England are they recruiting working-class youngsters in greater or lesser proportions than in the country as a whole or England as a whole?
Mr Watmore: My understanding is that at the regional level—

Q125 Mr Davidson: Maybe you could confirm that with the National Audit Office.
Sir Martin Harris: There is a ward-by-ward breakdown for the whole of England, certainly.

Q126 Mr Davidson: We are dealing to some extent with the issue of social attitudes and I wanted just to be clear whether or not there was something that said that in the north west you were not getting nearly as many people coming forward, which would be indicative of a general attitude. In terms of comparators, can I just be clear whether or not comparisons are done with Scotland and Northern Ireland and whether or not you are doing as well as or better than, or, if they are not appropriate comparators, who is?
Mr Watmore: My understanding is that the primary data here is for England.

Q127 Mr Davidson: I know that, but you must compare yourselves with somebody, do you not?
Mr Watmore: Not in the sense that you are meaning because we operate different systems, apart from anything else.

Q128 Mr Davidson: No, but colour and gender are fairly applicable in other countries as well, I would have thought, as a category. I can see that you might have a difficulty about socio-economic background, but are Scotland or Northern Ireland doing better in terms of recruiting these under-represented groups and are you saying to me that you do not know?
Mr Watmore: I do not know here but I will check for you.

Q129 Mr Davidson: Does anybody know?
Professor Eastwood: Participation is higher in Scotland.
Mr Watmore: But the system is different as well.

Q130 Mr Davidson: No, I know it is different. I want to check whether or not the system is different in Scotland or better in Scotland, which I thought the Professor was saying. Are you closing the gap or is the gap widening?
Mr Watmore: I think the system in Scotland is different in a number of areas, including student

finance, which does impact these figures. You have to understand the whole system. Within our system in England we are trying to raise the—

Q131 Mr Davidson: Yes, I do actually understand that point, but what I am trying to clarify is if the percentage, for example, of working-class children going on to university in Scotland is better or worse.[7] There might be some lessons we could draw from that which would give us an indication as to policy. You seem to be saying to me that you do not actually compare yourselves directly with anybody else, like Scotland or Northern Ireland or Australia, Canada, New Zealand?
Mr Watmore: I was trying not to say that. The team of people in all our organisations will be aware of the differences between different countries. The point I am making is that we are dealing with a holistic system here in which we can make genuine shifts and lessons to be learned from around the world are taken into account.
Sir Martin Harris: As it happens I looked at the Scottish figures just before I came in and the participation rate, as David said, is slightly higher, but the participation rates from the socio-economic groups we are most concerned with are slightly higher in England than in Scotland. The differences are quite small but it is interesting that the gap is in that direction.

Q132 Mr Davidson: Do you compare yourselves then with anybody else? Do you have a benchmark? To some extent, coming back to Mr Curry's point, is there a figure beyond which it is unreasonable to expect you to move? I am not clear about that, whether or not you have a genuine, reasonable aspiration to reach.
Mr Watmore: I can say we do not have a figure that we believe is a ceiling or anything of that sort. What we are trying to do is raise overall participation towards 50%.

Q133 Mr Davidson: Okay, I understand that. Can I turn to the question of the Russell Group? There was an issue there about it being worse than the other universities but I think Professor Eastwood said it was getting better. What I am not clear about is whether or not it is getting better faster than the other universities or slower and therefore is the gap narrowing or widening? Can you clarify that for me?
Mr Watmore: Yes, and I will let David add to this. The general thrust of the achievement over the last few years has been to get more people into the system so the participation has been widened, but we have a bigger challenge to get more people into the selecting universities, Russell Group, et cetera, in other words, in the jargon, the fairer access aspects of the debate rather than the widening participatory aspects. That is a challenge for us.

Q134 Mr Davidson: With respect, that is not the question I asked you.

Mr Watmore: Then I misunderstood you.

Q135 Mr Davidson: The question I asked you was, is the gap between the Russell Group and the pre-1992 universities widening or narrowing? I accept the Professor's point that they are both moving in the right direction but I am not clear whether or not they are moving at the same speed.
Professor Eastwood: What you have sitting behind these benchmarks is a series of benchmarks which are normalised for a whole range of things—subject mix, location and so forth, so inevitably, if, for example, Russell Group institutions "improve" their performance, that shifts the benchmark, so they will always in that sense be chasing the benchmark.

Q136 Mr Davidson: Yes, but you did indicate earlier on that the Russell Group collectively were improving and that the pre-1992 universities collectively were improving. What I am not certain is which is improving faster and whether or not the Russell Group, already behind, are falling further behind comparatively.
Professor Eastwood: There is quite a lot of scatter in the Russell Group data.

Q137 Mr Davidson: Can you just give me a yes or a no? They are either catching up or they are not. It is a simple question.
Professor Eastwood: Because all institutions are making progress the gap is remaining broadly as is and the benchmark is adjusted to demonstrate that.

Q138 Mr Davidson: You could have said that. So in fact the Russell Group are not improving any faster than the non-Russell Group?
Professor Eastwood: That is broadly accurate.

Q139 Mr Davidson: Fine; that is really what I was after. Can I relate that then to the question of Cambridge? My colleague raised a question to which you replied that you only deal with the university as a whole, and he was suggesting in fact that the individual colleges have vastly different recruitment policies, but I think we would be very upset if we thought that one particular college was becoming a working-class ghetto and that there were "proles" colleges, as it were, and "toffs" colleges. Why do you not then look at the actions of the individual colleges?
Professor Eastwood: Because, as far as the Funding Council is concerned, we fund the University of Cambridge. The University of Cambridge will distribute our funding as it deems appropriate between its own colleges and it will hold its own colleges to account.

Q140 Mr Davidson: No, again, I know that. What I am asking you is why do you not take an interest in the policies of the individual colleges?

[7] Ev 20

Professor Eastwood: As far as we are concerned, our statutory—

Q141 Mr Davidson: And do you think that is an omission?
Professor Eastwood: As far as we are concerned, we are statutorily—

Q142 Mr Davidson: Do you think that is an omission?
Professor Eastwood: We are statutorily entitled to deal with the institution. We have now got agreement from the Secretary of State that we will require the University of Cambridge, in line with other institutions, to produce its widening participation strategy. We expect its widening participation strategy to indicate what the widening participation commitments of the colleges and the University of Cambridge are, so I think in due course we will have a way of answering that.
Mr Davidson: The final point I want to pick up is that the public schools are not squealing about what you are doing on this front, as far as I can hear. They squeal occasionally but not very much, which indicates perhaps that you are not having much of an impact. Since they are making money out of getting people into university they presumably would be squealing much more if they thought that some of their pupils were being squeezed out, because my impression is that the expansion of numbers going to university—

Q143 Chairman: You have had 15 minutes. Your time is up. Mr Watmore, do you want to answer that or not?
Mr Watmore: The independent sector is thriving and doing well but the state sector is catching up.
Chairman: Thank you. Your last question, Mr Bacon.

Q144 Mr Bacon: Mr Watmore, I was slightly surprised that we did not see a little more information about retention and the correlation that may or may not exist between different cohorts going to universities of whatever kind, whether Russell or otherwise, and the retention rates. This Committee, as you know, looks at this issue. You spent £800 million over four years on trying to improve retention rates. I distinctly remember the figures—22% at the beginning of this expenditure and it was also 22% at the end. That is a 22% drop-out rate, which was very good compared with continental Europe but very bad by comparison with historical British standards due to the expansion of higher education. You must have this data somewhere even if it is in more than one place. Can you assemble it for us so that we can see if there is a correlation?[8]

Mr Watmore: I will take that off line, certainly.

Q145 Mr Bacon: Thank you. You mentioned that the statistic still holds that people who go to university do better in terms of their overall income. You said £100,000 net of tax. That is average lifetime earnings, is it, £100,000 net of tax, more than if they had not gone to university?
Mr Watmore: That is the so-called graduate premium, yes.

Q146 Mr Bacon: What is the amount of extra tax that they have paid?
Mr Watmore: That will obviously depend on the area in which they earned the money.

Q147 Mr Bacon: I am looking for a number.
Mr Watmore: It is net of tax over the period of time so somebody who was earning in one period would have paid a different percentage of their earnings in tax.

Q148 Mr Bacon: You have got a figure. You gave us a figure, £100,000 net of tax. If you are capable of giving us that figure, the other figure, how much extra tax they paid over their lifetime on average, must also be knowable, must it not?
Mr Watmore: It may or it may not be.

Q149 Mr Bacon: But how can it not be? Otherwise how do you get to £100,000 net of tax?
Mr Watmore: We take the net of tax figure. We do not take the gross before tax figure.

Q150 Mr Bacon: How do you get to a net of tax figure unless you know what the tax rate was?
Mr Watmore: Because we know what people's take-home pay is and from that we then assemble the data.

Q151 Mr Bacon: In that case you must know gross and net.
Mr Watmore: Not necessarily.

Q152 Mr Bacon: All I am asking you for is how much is the extra tax paid over a lifetime. You must be able to find out.[9]
Mr Watmore: I will ask the question of the people in the office if we have that information. I will have a check.

Q153 Mr Bacon: I would be grateful. I find it difficult to understand how you could not know it somewhere, but anyway, I will move on. Professor Eastwood, you were Vice Chancellor of the UEA for four years. In fact, you were during that time contractually obliged to live in a very large house in my constituency.
Professor Eastwood: It was a great pleasure.
Mr Bacon: And I very much enjoyed your hospitality there on one occasion.

[8] Ev 20

[9] Ev 20

Chairman: Ah, well, there we are then. This is why we have all these soft questions, is it?

Q154 Mr Bacon: I should have declared that instantly. It is also true that during the period—this is on page 44—between 2002-2006 you have got four green dots there, indicating that the UEA performed significantly better than the benchmark, and then the moment you left it went to grey, so you have every reason, I suppose, to feel fairly smug about that bit of the chart. The UEA is not a Russell Group university. When I was an undergraduate it was known as the University of Easy Access, and I speak as someone who has constituents who go there. It has now got a number of world-class departments, as you know, and I am wondering what did you do at the UEA that produced the results in that table.
Professor Eastwood: I took a number of decisions when I was at UEA. One of them, as you will recall, Mr Bacon, was to renegotiate the relationship between the university and the further education college, precisely because the further education college, City College, Norwich, was reaching out to some of these low participation neighbourhoods and that was quite important. You will recall that we also had a major venture in Suffolk which reached out to Yarmouth and to Lowestoft. There was a series of interventions that we made which over time, I think, will address some of the questions of participation in difficult-to-reach neighbourhoods. The other decision I took, which goes back to an earlier strand in the discussion, was that when we submitted our OFFA agreement to Sir Martin we did not maximise the bursary offer because we wanted to make long-term investments in reaching out particularly to the rural areas of Norfolk and we knew that what we were doing was making seed-corn investments which would pay dividends, we hoped, over a period of time, so it was a quite deliberate decision not to maximise the bursary offer but to balance off the bursary offer with these longer term investments working in partnerships with schools and college.

Q155 Mr Bacon: Those are two very interesting points and I think it would be helpful for the Committee to have a bit more detail in our report, in our appendices, because they have obviously been successful and the pressure for it looks like it dropped off when you left. Perhaps we could learn from that, so if you are able to send us a note in a bit more detail about those two strategies that would be very helpful. I would like to ask the NAO a question; I think it is Mr Woodward. On page 14 there is this table, Box 1, which talks about the participation trends of particular groups over the last five years. It says "trends", but if you take, for example, the first block there, "Females from non-white ethnic backgrounds appear well represented". Correct me if I am wrong, but is there anywhere in this table where I can see the trend for that group, "Females from non-white ethnic backgrounds" between 2001 and 2004? What was the trend for that particular group over those three years?
Mr Woodward: There are no detailed figures.

Q156 Mr Bacon: That is what I thought, and the same would be true all the way through, but presumably the data do exist?
Mr Woodward: The data does exist.

Q157 Mr Bacon: I found this generalised to a level of banality and what I would like is a bit more specific data. Presumably, for example, you have got, have you, to go to table 10 on page 21, for the Russell Group, for pre-1992 universities excluding the Russell Group, for small specialist colleges for post-1992? For each of those segments you have got data, have you, on women, men, higher and lower socio-economic groups and various kinds of ethnicity?
Mr Woodward: I do not think we have the data broken down by the different types of universities, Russell Group, pre-1992, plus-1992, but we certainly do have—

Q158 Mr Bacon: Do you not?
Mr Woodward: I do not think we have that data broken down in more detail than is presented in the report, but what we certainly do have is more detailed data underlying what we have summarised in Box 1. We do have that.

Q159 Mr Bacon: I think it would be very helpful if you could send us a note, basically in a tabular form, with numbers for each year so that one can see trends, because you cannot really see trends in this at all. It would be very helpful to know, for example, going back to table 10 with these different segments, different kinds of universities. It is no surprise that the post-1992 universities, that is the 49 there that are mostly the former polytechnics, are, according to this benchmark, probably on this chart—I have not looked through—with all the green dots, is that correct?
Mr Woodward: Yes.

Q160 Mr Bacon: It is no surprise that that is where they are because they had lower academic entrance requirements and, as the Chairman said earlier, it is absolutely no surprise that the Russell Group is where it is, but in order to draw lessons it would be very helpful to have much more specific trend information category by category. For example, you did a report on improving poorly performing schools and I distinctly remember there were tables in the back with the different categories. For example, you had different ethnic groups—Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, white British and so on. Presumably that information exists in relation to these data on widening participation, does it not?
Mr Woodward: We will provide you with more data if we can, if we have it, if we can break it down by groups of university we will do that, but I am not aware that we have that. I will have to discuss that with the department.

Q161 Mr Bacon: If you could send us as many tables that show trends and slice them and dice them in as

many different ways as you can, it would be extremely helpful. [10]

Mr Woodward: Yes.

Chairman: As you did not give me dinner, Professor, I can point out that after you left the "low participation, no previous HE" actually went up and also for "low participation neighbourhood" the proportion went up after you left the university. Mr Davidson has one other question he wants to ask. You do not need to answer that.

Mr Davidson: You will maybe provide us a note on this if you cannot do this now. Paragraph 3.21 has a section saying that as many as 12,000 students entering higher education in 2006 on full state support failed to collect the bursary. Obviously, that is a cause for concern. I would be grateful I you would clarify how that came about and what you are doing to resolve it. [11]

Chairman: And you can do it by way of a note if you wish.

Q162 Mr Davidson: And whether or not the 12,000 are split in any way geographically and whether or not you can say there are particular institutions or geographically or so-and-so.

Sir Martin Harris: What I can say is that the problem has now been solved. It was a one-year problem.

Q163 Chairman: And I want to have a note. I understand, and I do not know but the note will tell me, that the proportion of white working-class children coming to universities in the last 50 years has not significantly changed. I may be wrong so I would like to have the figures, please, from 1958 to 2008. [12]

Mr Watmore: It may well be impossible to get that but I will go back—

Q164 Chairman: It is very important. I want to see the long-term trends and what is happening with all these initiatives and all the rest of it, the proportion of universities with white working-class children. [13]

Mr Watmore: We will do our best to get you the intent behind the question.

Chairman: Gentlemen, thank you very much for what has been a most interesting hearing, particularly as a father of children at universities.

[10] Ev 24
[11] Ev 21
[12] Ev 22
[13] Ev 22

Supplementary Memorandum Submitted by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)

Question 30–32 (Mr Touhig): *A summary of the consultation on areas where there is a lack of higher education provision*

The Government outlined plans for the new *University Challenge* in a paper published on 3 March 2008. HEFCE were asked "to lead a debate with a wide range of organisations to develop a transparent mechanism for communities to put together a bid for funds for an higher education (HE) centre or university campus". In response to this HEFCE conducted research into how to define areas of low local HE provision and sought views on how this research might be used to create a "common evidence base" to quantify some (not all) aspects of the benefit of new provision. As part of this process HEFCE ran a series of regional consultation events (see http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/events/2008/challenge/) in September 2008. The seminar presentation on the "common evidence base" covers these issues; the slides from this presentation (referenced below) together with an explanatory transcript are available on the HEFCE website.

The HEFCE presentation supporting the consultation events shows that HEFCE can map the proportion of HE entrants who study locally but that this is not sufficient to identify areas with low local provision because it cannot distinguish between choices and constraints. Instead HEFCE needs to be able to map local study opportunities and the first stage in doing so is to understand the geography of the local study zone for higher education. HEFCE's research investigates this by new analysis of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applicant choices and young participation rates, allowing definition of a "local study zone" and consequently a map of the distribution of local study opportunities (slide 20). HEFCE also found evidence that the academic "attainability" of local provision is important to local study (slides 18 and 19) and can result in a different geography of local provision (slide 21).

In order to translate these findings to a method that HEFCE can use in discriminating between competing new provision proposals it needs to be able to define the benefit offered by new provision (slide 22). This requires decisions to be made on what type of provision HEFCE wants to target in areas of low local provision (slide 23) and whether HEFCE should prioritise certain population groups (slide 24). Once these decisions are set HEFCE can map the relative benefit of locating new provision at different sites (slides 26 and 27 present two examples).

HEFCE is currently analysing the results from a national consultation on the role this research should play in the decision making process (relative to other aspects of proposals for new provision). If it is decided to use a common evidence base of the nature outlined in the presentation then HEFCE plans to make the final version available on our website in early 2009.

The common evidence base alone would not determine the location of new HE centres. In making a case HEFCE expects proposers to cite local circumstances not taken account of in the common evidence base such as, for example, evidence of employer demand.

Question 105–106 (Mr Curry): *Correlation between institutions with the highest rate of attracting people from deprived backgrounds and the rate of drop-out*

It is true that institutions with higher proportions of students from deprived backgrounds have higher drop-out rates. However, one should not forget that these students also have much lower prior attainment. Once you compare students with similar prior attainment and similar subject choice, then the relationship is much less strong. In fact, there are plenty of institutions who, considering they take on a lot of students from deprived backgrounds and with low prior attainment, do much better than expected on drop-out.

Question 110–111 (Mr Davidson): *Students in university who had one or more parents who also went to university, broken down by category, institution and social class*

Estimates of participation rates by parental education background can be obtained from the Youth Cohort Study. UCAS have recently started asking the parental education background question of HE applicants—which would allow the calculation of entrant proportions—but have encountered a high level of "prefer not to say" responses which will reduce utility substantially.

Question 114–116 (Mr Davidson): *Of the top 10 staff in DIUS and HEFCE how many had university education, Oxbridge education, and had a parent at university*

Of the top 10 staff in DIUS, nine had a university education, five of them at Oxford or Cambridge and four had a parent at a university. Of the top 10 staff in HEFCE, 10 had a university education, two of which were at Oxford or Cambridge, and four had a parent who had a university education.

Question 123–125 (Mr Davidson): *The percentage of white working-class young people from NW and NE England going on to higher (and further) education compared with the average for all England*

HEFCE have published young participation rates by country and region previously (HEFCE 2005/03 see www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_03/05_03.pdf), including variation of area-based groups by region (Table 20, p 223), and these will be updated in the future. Although there are large differences between the participation rates of English regions, detailed statistical modelling of area participation rates suggests that once population composition (parental education levels, etc) is taken into account there are no significant regional patterns to young HE participation rates.

Question 126–131 (Mr Davidson): *The percentage of white working-class young people from Scotland and Northern Ireland going on to higher education*

Percentage of white working class in Scotland and Northern Ireland: UCAS initial entrant statistics for 2008 show the proportion of UK entrants by country of origin. According to the statistics English students show a slightly higher proportion of National Statistics—Socio Economic Classification (NS-SEC) 4–7 than Scottish. Excluding those of unknown NS-SEC, the proportions are: English = 28.01%, Scottish = 26.97%. Including unknowns: English = 23.49%, Scottish = 22.97%. UCAS data do not show UK Entrants by country of study, data above are country of origin, nor are they disaggregated by ethnicity.

Question 144 (Mr Bacon): *Analyses to determine if there is a correlation between individual higher education institution's retention rates and their widening participation performance*

See the response to Q105–106 above.

Question 145–152 (Mr Bacon): *the value of extra tax paid by a graduate over a lifetime compared with a non-graduate, to complement the quoted net value of £100,000 graduate premium*

The value of extra tax paid with a net £100,000 premium depends on two main factors:

— the tax rates that apply when the income was earned; and

— the pattern of working across the years and earnings within particular years.

For a typical graduate we might find that to begin with there was a small premium in earnings over a non-graduate but that the premium became greater over the years. Changing circumstances would mean the 40% tax band would be entered for some years, but not for others.

The two examples at the extremes of possibilities would be that:

— if the £100,000 net advantage was all subject to 20% tax then the gross income would be £125,000 and the tax would be £25,000; and

— if the £100,000 net advantage was all subject to 40% tax then the gross income would been £166,666 and the tax would be £66,666.

It would be difficult to determine what the average rate of tax might be and the Department has not undertaken any research in this area.

Question 161–162 (Mr Davidson): *Why 12,000 students who were eligible for bursaries in 2006–07 did not apply, what has been done to improve the situation and if there were any geographical or institutional patterns*

Background

The bursary process was designed to be simple. Institutions require students' household residual income (HRI) data in order to assess eligibility against their own bursary criteria. Students who apply for means tested state support already supply the financial information required by institutions on their student finance application form. Institutions either obtain this information by subscribing to the Student Loans Company's Higher Education Bursary and Scholarship Scheme (HEBSS) (86% of HEIs subscribe to HEBSS), or by requiring student to present evidence of their HRI (usually a grant notification letter) direct to the institution.

Consent to Share and Bursary Take up

The primary issue is that, as data protection requires that an active consent is obtained from both the student and their sponsor (ie parent or guardian), financial data is not automatically shared between the student finance application form and HEBSS systems.

The fact that in 2006–07 significant numbers of eligible students failed to collect their bursaries came as a surprise to the sector, as these students had already applied for state support and had therefore already actively engaged with the system.

Some students, or their sponsors, did not consent to share their financial information with their institution and consequently institutions that subscribe to HEBSS did not have the information they required in order to assess eligibility. However, the issue is not confined to data sharing restrictions, as institutions that do not subscribe to HEBSS also believe that some of their eligible students did not present their financial information to the institution and so have not claimed their bursaries. The underlying factor behind the take up issue appears to be low bursary awareness among some students or lack of understanding about bursary eligibility.

Efforts to Improve Bursary Awareness and Take up

Once the issue had been identified in the spring of 2007 (through SLC consent to share data), OFFA and SLC/HEBSS alerted institutions to the issue. We called for institutions to make additional efforts to publicise their bursary criteria and the collection process in order to maximise take up. We also required institutions to monitor bursary take up and report to us on what efforts they had made to improve take up. Students and sponsors can give consent retrospectively by telephoning the SLC and the SLC texted and emailed reminders to eligible students where consent had not yet been given.

Despite these significant efforts we estimate that the average bursary take up for 2006–07 for eligible students on full state support was around 80%, with up to 12,000 eligible students failing to collect a bursary.

Efforts to improve bursary awareness and take up have continued beyond 2006–07. As well as institutional awareness/take up campaigns, supported by our advice on good practice, the SLC have run a "consent to share" telephone campaign, and some wording improvements were made to the 2007–08 student finance application form. We expect to see a small improvement in take up rates in 2007–08 (we have not yet completed our monitoring process for 2007–08 and will publish a report to Parliament in February or March 2008).

In response to the bursary take up issue, the Department's lawyers have reviewed the data sharing issues and for 2008–09 the student finance application form was altered to require an active opt out of data sharing rather than an active opt in. SLC data shows that this has resulted in a step change in consent to share rates for all means tested applicants (regardless of bursary eligibility) from 73% in 2007–08, to 97% in 2008–09, indicating that the take up issue for institutions in HEBSS has largely been solved and is primarily a historic issue.

However, we are not complacent. We will continue to closely monitor bursary take up, particularly at institutions that do not subscribe to HEBSS and will continue to expect institutions to be proactive in their efforts to raise bursary awareness. We will also work closely with the SLC and HEBSS to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to contact any remaining non-consenters.

OFFA has commissioned research, due to report in April/May 2009 into bursary awareness and take up which will provide some good practice for institutions. This will be particularly important for institutions that do not subscribe to HEBSS, but will also be of use to all institutions in raising bursary awareness more generally.

Analysis of Consent to Share Rates by Geography and Institution Type

Table 1 illustrates that there are variations in consent to share rates by institution region (we have no data on consent by student domicile). There is no evidence of a north/south divide with institutions in the East of England and London the least successful and institutions in Yorkshire and Humber and the North East the most successful. We have not done any further analysis of the cause of these variations. However, based on our experience of institutions' monitoring reports to us, there does not appear to be a simple correlation between the extent of the actions taken to increase bursary awareness and the take up rate achieved. There may be something more complex taking place about the nature of the institution and its student cohort.

Table 2 shows that pre-92 institutions have a slightly higher consent rate than post-92 institutions. Again, we have not done any further analysis into this but this may have something to do with the higher level of core bursary offered in pre-92 institutions.

Given that we expect the take up issue to be largely addressed in 2008–09 we do not currently plan any analysis in this area. However, we will revise this position if our monitoring results or good practice research identify that the issue requires further attention.

Table 1

HEBBS-SUBSCRIBED HEI "CONSENT TO SHARE RATES" FOR STUDENTS ON FULL GRANT, GROUPED BY REGION

Region	*Number of students who did not consent to share financial data*	*Average consent to share rate*
South West	729	84.0%
East of England	707	73.3%
London	3,401	75.2%
South East	1,218	83.3%
East Midlands	1,054	81.5%
West Midlands	1,269	80.1%
North East	466	86.2%
North West	1,808	81.9%
Yorkshire and Humber	908	84.7%
Total	11,560	80.6%

Table 2

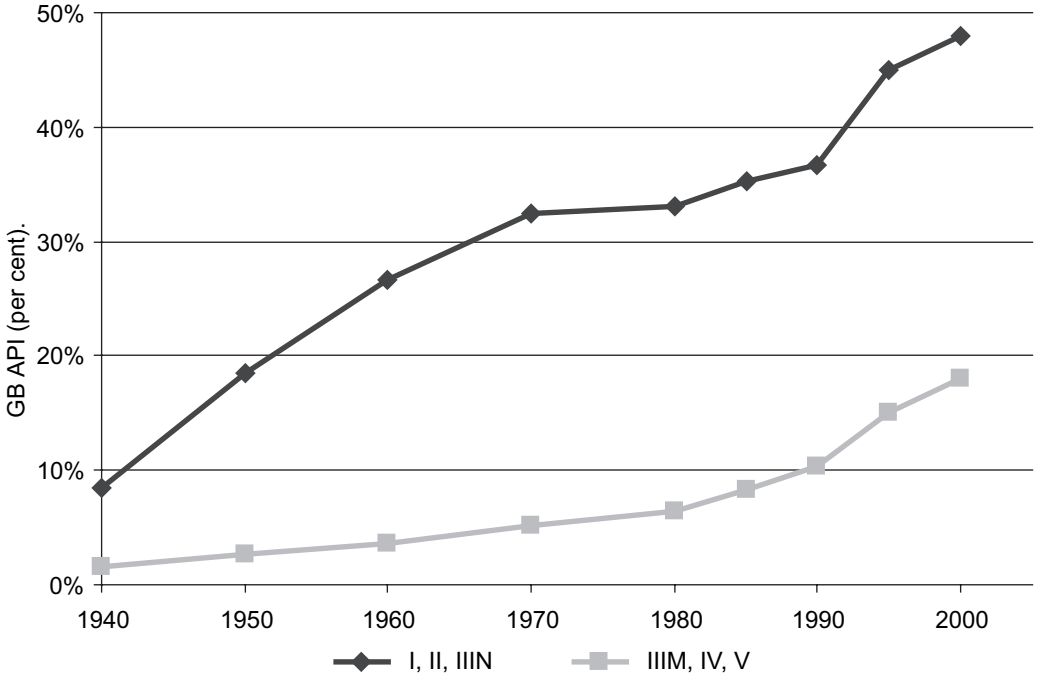
HEBBS-SUBSCRIBED HEI "CONSENT TO SHARE RATES" BY INSTITUTION TYPE (PRE AND POST 92) FOR STUDENTS ON FULL GRANT

Region	*Number of students who did not consent to share financial data*	*Average consent to share rate*
Pre-92 HEIs	3,449	83.5%
Post-92 HEIs	8,111	79.1%

Question 163–164 (Chairman): *The long-term trend in the proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, compared with the national population, over the last 50 years*

The socio-economic classification was introduced in 2001, and included in higher education data from 2002–03. Previously, social class was used when looking at the background of higher education students.

The Age Participation Index (API) by social class shows the number of home domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate HE aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19 year olds in the population. This was split to provide a participation rate for the top three social classes, a participation rate for the bottom three social classes, and the gap in between. These are shown in the chart below:



Source: DIUS.

As social class was discontinued in 2001 and replaced by socio-economic class, the API by social class is not available for later years than 2001.

From 2002–03, the Department has made use of a similarly presented participation measure based on socio-economic class. This is the Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) measure. This is Indicator 6 for the DCSF-led PSA 11 on narrowing the gap: "The gap between the initial participation in full-time higher education rates for young people aged 18, 19 and 20 from the top three and bottom four socio-economic classes".

FYPSEC provides three figures for each year:

— The proportion of English-domiciled 18, 19 and 20 year olds from the top three socio-economic classes, who participate for the first time in full-time higher education courses at UK higher education institutions and English, Scottish and Welsh further education colleges.

— The proportion of English-domiciled 18, 19 and 20 year olds from the bottom four socio-economic classes, who participate for the first time in full-time higher education courses at UK higher education institutions and English, Scottish and Welsh further education colleges.

— The gap between these two participation rates

At the time of publication of the Departmental Annual Report, FYPSEC figures were available for 2002–03—2005–06 as follows:

	2002	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*
Participation rate for NS-SECs 1, 2, 3	44.6%	41.5%	41.5%	43.3%
Participation rate for NS-SECs 4, 5, 6, 7	17.6%	17.9%	17.7%	19.9%
Difference	27.0%	23.6%	23.8%	23.4%
(Total drop in gap: **3.5 percentage points**)				

Source: DIUS response to Parliamentary Question 208354 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080605/text/80605w0020.htm

Since the Departmental Annual Report was published, FYPSEC has been revised according to changes in underlying datasets (including revisions to the population estimates and the Labour Force Survey by the ONS) and updated to 2006–07 as follows:

	2002	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*
Participation rate for NS-SECs 1, 2, 3	44.1%	40.9%	41.2%	42.8%	39.5%
Participation rate for NS-SECs 4, 5, 6, 7	17.5%	17.8%	17.4%	19.8%	19.0%
Difference	26.5%	23.1%	23.7%	22.9%	20.5%
(Total drop in gap: **6.1 percentage points**)					

Source: "Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) 2008 Update", DIUS (2008).

Note that the figures suggest a narrowing of the gap of 6.0 percentage points rather than 6.1 percentage points. This is due to rounding and the correct figure is 6.1 percentage points.

Due to the introduction of variable fees in 2006–07, both 2005–06 and 2006–07 were exceptional years in the higher education sector. A significant number of people entered higher education earlier than planned in 2005–06 in order to avoid the fees in 2006–07. This was followed by an expected drop in higher education entrants in 2006–07, before UCAS data showed that the previous trend of increasing applications resumed for 2007–08 and 2008–09. Consequently the FYPSEC measure, which is affected by the underlying population as well as by the number of entrants and their socio-economic breakdown, displayed particular volatility for 2005–06 and 2006–07. DIUS analysts are therefore reserving interpretation of the apparent significantly narrowed gap until figures are available for 2007–08.

Supplementary memorandum from the National Audit Office

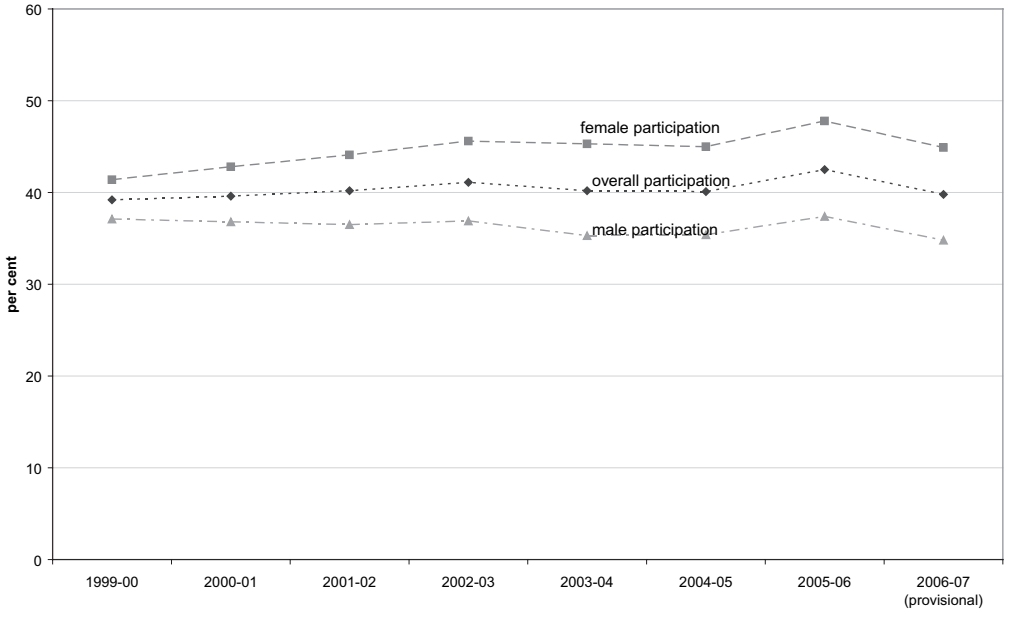
Question 159 (Mr Richard Bacon): *Trends for low participation groups—supporting analysis*

GENDER

1. The Higher Education Initial Participation Rate[1] split by gender (Figure 1) shows that participation rate for men is currently around 10 percentage points less than that for women, and the gap has been increasing over recent years. This trend is reflected in the Higher Education Funding Council's cohort based young participation rates (under 21) which show that young women are 24% more likely to enter higher education than young men[2]. The Department's analysis of administrative data and the Youth Cohort Study[3] found that the increase in students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is based largely on an increase in female participation.

Figure 1

HIGHER EDUCATION INITIAL PARTICIPATION RATE FOR ENGLAND FROM 1999–2000 TO 2006–07, SPLIT BY GENDER



Source: Department of Innovation Universities and Skills, Statistical First Release: Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic Years 1999/2000–2006/07 (Provisional), 27 March 2008 available on http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000780/index.shtm

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[1] The Higher Education Initial Participation Rate measures the sum of participation rates for each age 17 to 30, roughly equivalent to the probability that a 17 year old will enter higher education by age 30.

[2] Higher Education Funding Council for England, provisional results from forthcoming *Trends in young participation report*, where young is defined as those that enter a higher education course at age 18 or 19.

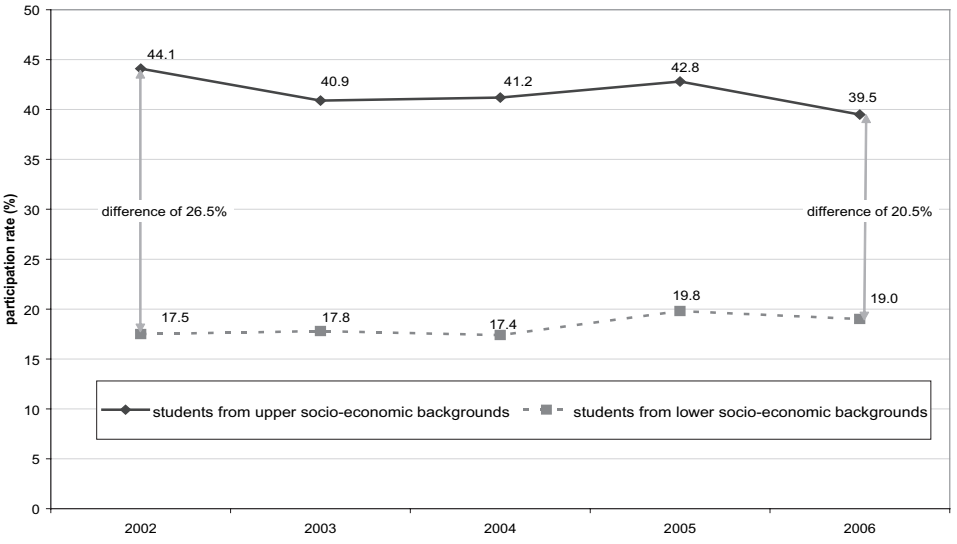
[3] Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007), *Overview of patterns and trends in gender equality in higher education*, HE: Analysis April 2007

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

2. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly under-represented in higher education. The proportion of the 18–20 year old population of England in higher education from lower socio-economic backgrounds has increased since 2002 by less than two percentage points to 19.0% in 2006, peaking at 19.8% in 2005 (Figure 2).[4] Conversely, there has been a decrease in participation of 18–20 year olds from upper socio-economic backgrounds, from 44.1% in 2002 to 39.5 in 2006. The proportion from upper socio-economic backgrounds that enter higher education is double that from lower socio-economic backgrounds, although between 2002 and 2006 the participation gap has narrowed by 6.5 percentage points.

Figure 2

PARTICIPATION GAP BETWEEN PEOPLE FROM UPPER AND LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Source: Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills data, Full Time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) 2002–06.

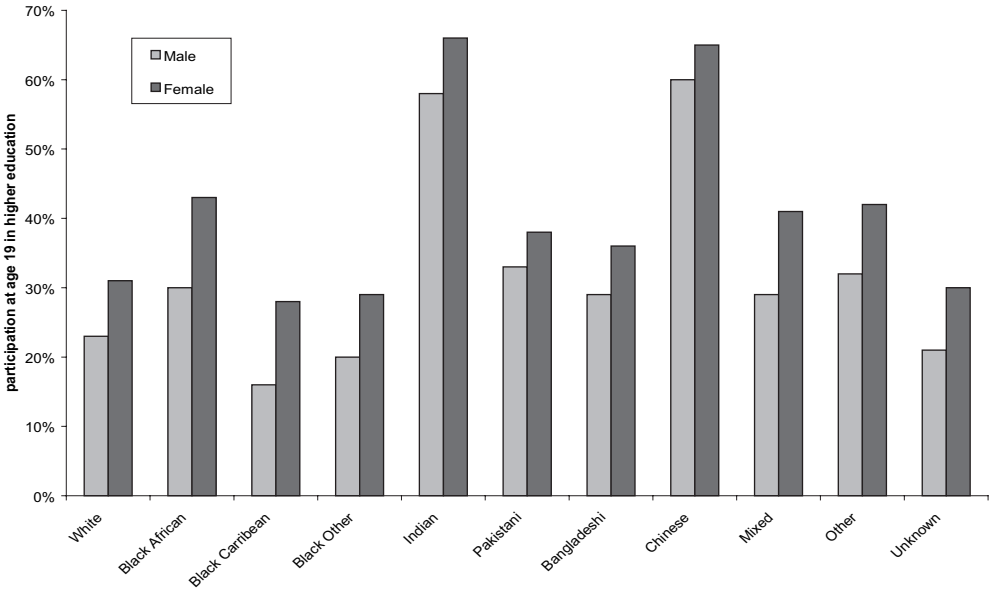
[4] Based on Full Time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) which measures the number of 18, 19 and 20 year old English-domiciled first time participants in full-time higher education as a proportion of the 18, 19 and 20 year old population of England, split into participation rates for the upper (1–3) and lower (4–7) National Statistics Socio-economic groups. Department for Education and Skills (2007), *Full time young participation by economic class, a new widening participation measure*, Research report RR806.

ETHNICITY

3. Participation of ethnic groups in higher education varies considerably (Figure 3). Black Caribbean groups in particular have low participation rates of around 20%, compared with rates of over 60% for Indian and Chinese groups. Females from all groups participate in higher proportions than men.

Figure 3

HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS BY GENDER



Notes: Figure shows participation for state school pupils only.

Source: Data supplied by Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills from "Gender gaps in higher education, an analysis of the relationship between prior attainment and young participation by Gender, Socio-economic class and ethnicity". Research report 08-14, 2008. Figure 14, page 28.

4. Table 1a presents the proportions of young ethnic group populations that have progressed from attaining five GCSEs at A*–C in English state schools to entering higher education, sub-divided by those living in the 20% most deprived areas and those living in remaining 80% of areas. To better understand the progression of people from different ethnic groups, the data presented in Table 1a has been indexed with a baseline of 100 and re-presented in Table 1b. Scores of over 100 indicate a higher proportion compared with the general population, and those under 100 indicate a lower proportion.

Table 1a

YOUNG ETHNIC GROUP PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION, IN THE CONTEXT OF ATTAINMENT

	Living in 20 % most deprived areas			*NOT living in 20% most deprived areas*		
	Proportion of total pupil population (%)	*Proportion of pupils population getting 5 A*–C GCSEs (%)*	*Proportion of students with 5 A*–C GCSEs who enter higher education (%)*	*Proportion of total pupil population (%)*	*Proportion of pupil population getting 5 A*–C GCSEs (%)*	*Proportion of Students with 5 A*–C GCSEs who enter higher education (%)*
White British	13.87	6.83	4.60	68.84	77.03	75.76
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	1.79	1.25	1.44	1.61	1.40	1.85
Black	1.83	1.01	1.10	1.50	1.20	1.39
White Other	0.65	0.42	0.41	1.92	2.26	2.50
Indian	0.54	0.55	0.80	1.95	2.61	4.07
Mixed Race	0.10	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.08	0.10
Chinese	0.08	0.11	0.15	0.27	0.41	0.59
Other	0.71	0.52	0.58	1.29	1.45	1.86
Not Known	0.43	0.20	0.15	2.55	2.60	2.56
Total	20.00	10.96	9.32	80.00	89.04	90.68

Notes: "Living in deprived areas" refers to living in the areas in the bottom IDACI quintile. IDACI is the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. It measures the proportion of children under the age of 16 in an area living in low income households. "Not living in deprived areas" refers to all other students. Analysis refers to pupils aged 15 in 2002 that entered higher education, or otherwise, at age 18 or 19.

Table 1b

PUPILS' ATTAINMENT BY ETHNIC GROUP AND DEPRIVATION

Data is indexed with baseline = 100 representing the school population, so the higher the number, the greater the representation of that group.

	Pupils living In 20 % most deprived areas			*Pupils NOT living in 20% most deprived areas*	
Ethnic group	*Pupil population getting 5 A*–C GCSEs (1)*	*Students with 5 A*–C GCSEs who go onto higher education (2)*		*Pupil population getting 5 A*–C GCSEs (3)*	*Students with 5 A*–C GCSEs who go onto higher education (4)*
White British	49.2	67.3	White British	111.9	98.4
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	69.7	115.1	Pakistani or Bangladeshi	87.2	131.7
Black	55.6	108.3	Black	80.2	115.2
White Other	64.8	98.6	White Other	117.7	110.8
Indian	102.6	143.8	Indian	133.7	155.6
Mixed Race	77.7	121.2	Mixed Race	103.5	136.3
Chinese	126.5	140.4	Chinese	151.7	144.4
Other	72.3	112.2	Other	112.7	128.4
Not Known	45.7	77.4	Not Known	101.8	98.7

Note: Data has been adjusted to a baseline of 100. For columns 1 and 3, data is indexed with baseline = 100 representing the school population. For columns 2 and 4, the baseline is the preceding column (1 and 3) ie the baseline is the qualified pupil population who have 5 GCSEs NOT the entire school population. The indicator is 100 if the proportion remains the same, less than 100 if has gone down and above 100 if it has gone up.

Source: NAO analysis of national pupil database linked to Higher Education Statistics Agency record.

5. Taken as a whole, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds appear more likely to enter higher education compared with white people with the same attainment. Indian and Chinese ethnic groups have the highest attainment and participation rates. Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students generally do less well at school, but of those that do achieve at GCSE, the majority progress to higher education.

6. Of young people living in deprived areas, white British and black pupils are the least likely to achieve five A*–Cs at GCSE (at about half the English average for state school children). However, if they achieve the grades, the chances of progressing onto higher education differ. White British pupils in deprived areas with five A*–C GCSEs have two thirds of the likelihood of going onto higher education compared with the English state school average for pupils with the same qualifications. In contrast, black pupils in deprived areas who achieve five A*–C GCSEs are about one and half times more likely to go onto higher education compared with the White British group in deprived areas with the same qualifications.

Deprived Areas

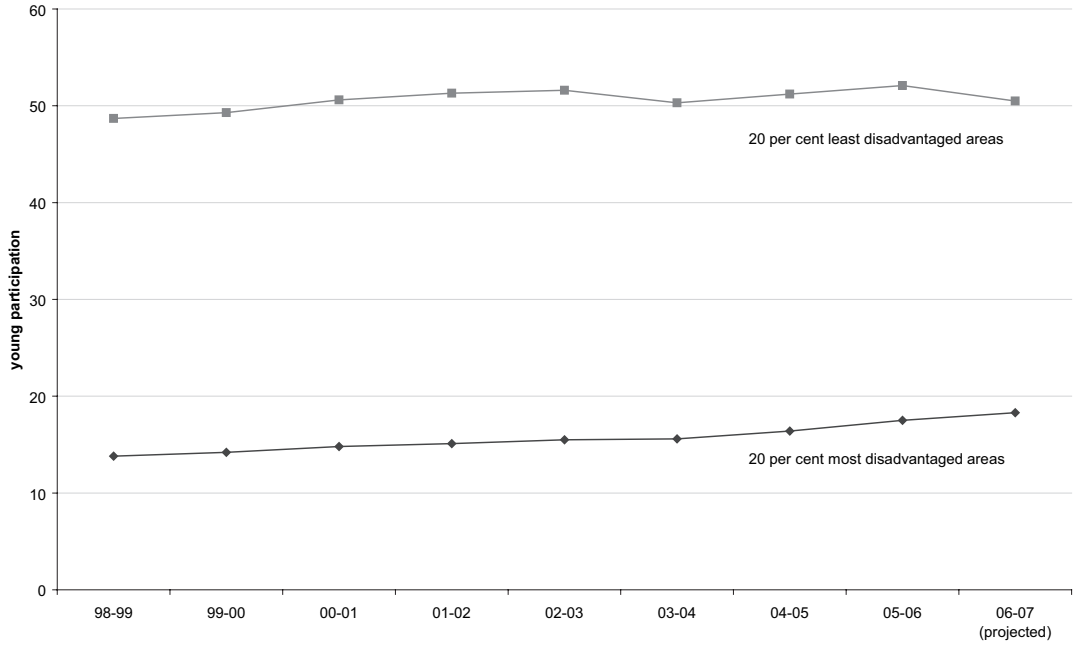
7. The 20% of pupils who live in deprived areas form only 11% of those who attain five A*–C GCSEs. Almost all of the latter enter higher education. In contrast, the 80% of pupils who do not live in deprived areas account for 89% of pupils attaining five A*–C GCSEs and 91% of the whole population later go on to higher education (Table 1a). Deprivation is significantly connected to poor performance at GCSE and to subsequent poor progression onto higher education.

8. The most recent analysis by the Higher Education Funding Council for England indicates that the differences between areas are decreasing. Young English people living in the 20% most deprived areas have experienced an increase in participation since 1998, but remain significantly under-represented compared with the general population. This compares with a modest increase for young people from the 20 per cent least deprived areas (Figure 4).[5] Proportionally, this increase has been greater than the English cohort as a whole, leading to a rise in their relative participation rate. This would suggest that for young people, where they live is becoming relatively less important to their chances of entering higher education but it is still a strong factor.

[5] Measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index for the most advantaged 20% of areas compared to the 20% least advantaged areas. This trend is reflected in other area-based measures. Provisional results from the Funding Council "trends in young participation" report.

Figure 4

YOUNG PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION FROM MOST AND LEAST DISADVANTAGED AREAS



Notes: Young participation is the proportion of a young cohort that enters a higher education course in a UK higher education institution or GB Further Education College at age 18 or, a year later, at age 19 from the 20% most disadvantaged area compared to the 20% least disadvantaged as measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. 2006–07 figures are a projection.

Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England, provisional results from "trends in young participation" report.

9. Table 2 shows the interaction of gender, ethnicity and deprivation on school attainment and progression to higher education. Deprivation appears to have the strongest effect with a lower proportion of pupils getting five A*–C grade GCSEs. White people from the 20% most deprived areas have the lowest attainment and progression rates, with males particularly low. Those from non-white backgrounds from less deprived areas are more likely to progress than any other group. For the purposes of this analysis we have used a white, non-white ethnic split, but acknowledge this may disguise differences between black and minority ethnic groups.

Table 2

THE INTERACTION FOR GENDER, ETHNICITY AND DEPRIVATION ON ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESSION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Data is indexed with baseline = 100 representing the school population, so the higher the number, the greater the representation of that group.

		Indexed share of pupils attaining 5 A–C GCSEs in English state schools*	*Indexed share of students with 5 A*–C GCSEs in English state schools who go onto higher education*
Living in deprived areas	Non-white females	68.9	115.7
	non-white Males	48.9	111.7
	white Females	57.0	73.2
	white Males	40.9	66.3
NOT living in deprived areas	non-white Females	105.3	126.2
	non-white Males	82.7	121.3
	white Females	122.6	106.3
	white Males	100.2	98.5

Notes: "Living in deprived areas" refers to living in the areas in the bottom IDACI quintile. "Not living in deprived areas" refers to all other students. Analysis refers to pupils aged 15 in 2002 and have entered higher education or otherwise at age 18 or 19.

Source: NAO analysis of National Pupil Database data on pupil performance in English state schools, linked to Higher Education Statistics Agency record.

People with Disabilities

10. It is not clear if people with disabilities are under-represented, and if so, to what extent, because it is difficult to accurately quantify the participation of people with disabilities in higher education compared with the general population. We compared data on the proportion of students with disabilities from the Higher Education Statistics Agency's student record with Labour Force Survey data on the proportion of the general population with disabilities, both of which have different definitions of disability.

11. The Higher Education Statistics Agency record shows type of disability based on the student's self-assessment. The Labour Force Survey records whether people of working age have:

- a "current disability" (as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)- people with a long-term disability which substantially limits their day-to-day activities; or
- a "working limited disability"—people with a long-term disability which affects the kind or amount of work they might do; or
- both a current disability and a work-limiting disability.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency record shows a general increase in the proportion of students declaring a disability from four to six per cent over the five years to 2006 for young people (under 21). The Labour Force Survey indicates that the proportion of the general population age 16 to 21 with a current and/or a work-limiting disability has fluctuated between 7.6% and 9.7% over the same period. This would suggest that people with disabilities remain under-represented in higher education. However, given the differences in definition described above, the conclusion is uncertain.

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