



National Audit Office

Widening participation in higher education

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL | HC 725 Session 2007-2008 | 25 June 2008

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20 June 2008

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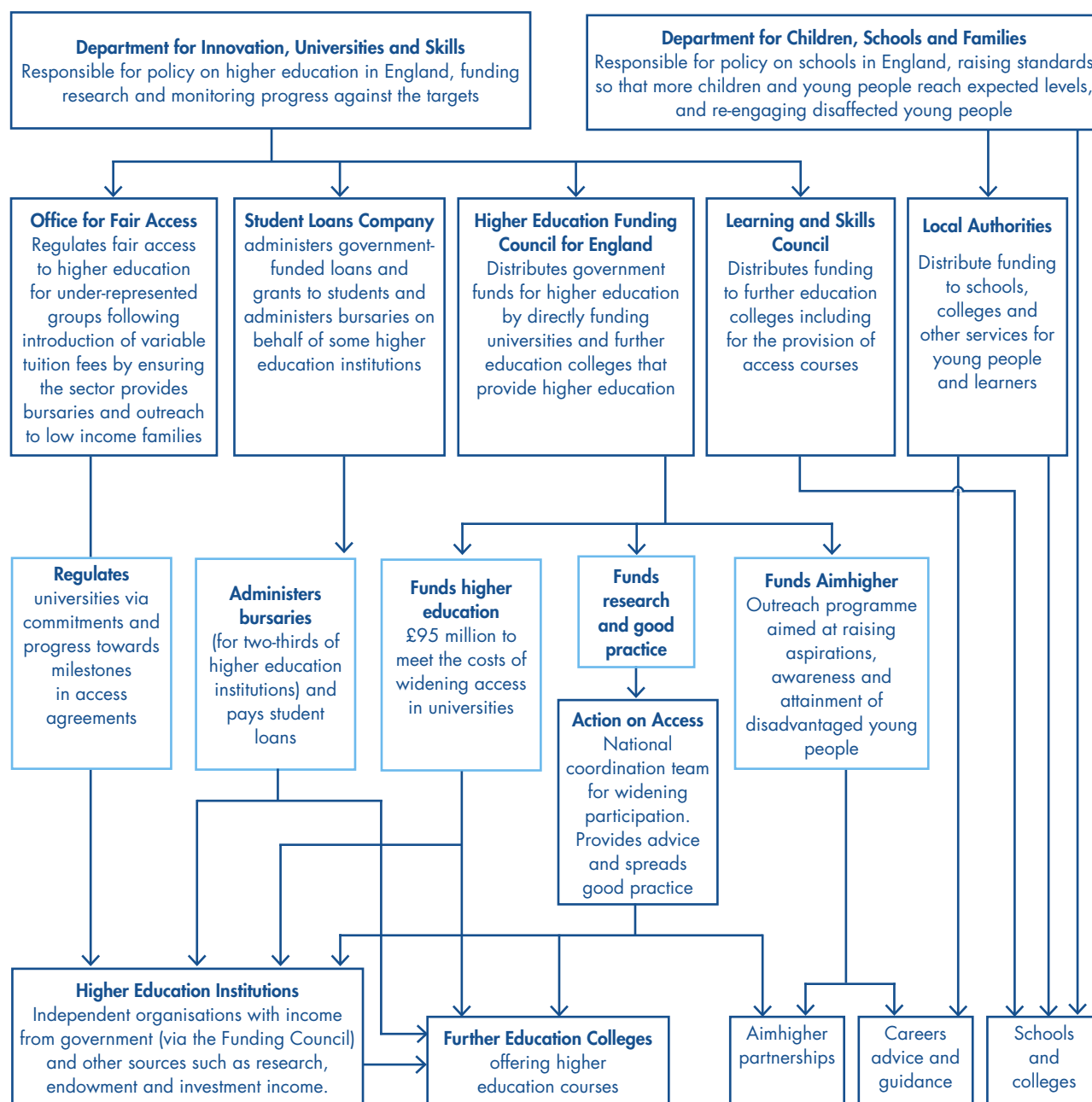
SUMMARY

1 This report examines the progress made by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (the Department), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (the Funding Council), the Office for Fair Access and higher education institutions in England in widening participation in higher education. The Government's 2003 White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* included a commitment to widen participation in higher education, by helping more people from under-represented groups, particularly lower socio-economic backgrounds, to participate successfully in higher education. This commitment sits alongside a policy to increase participation of those aged 18 to 30 towards 50 per cent by 2010. **Figure 1** presents an overview of the organisations that play a role in widening participation. The Funding Council has given institutions delivering higher education £392 million in

recurrent funding between 2001-02 and 2007-08 for widening participation. **Figure 2 on page 6** shows the range of sources and amounts of funding for widening participation for 2006-07.

- 2** We assessed progress against the following criteria:
- whether participation of under-represented groups in higher education is increasing (Part 1);
 - whether initiatives taken by the Department, the Funding Council, the Office for Fair Access and higher education institutions to widen participation are effective (Parts 2 and 3); and
 - whether higher education provision is delivered in a way that addresses the barriers to widening participation (Part 4).

1 A range of organisations play a role in widening participation

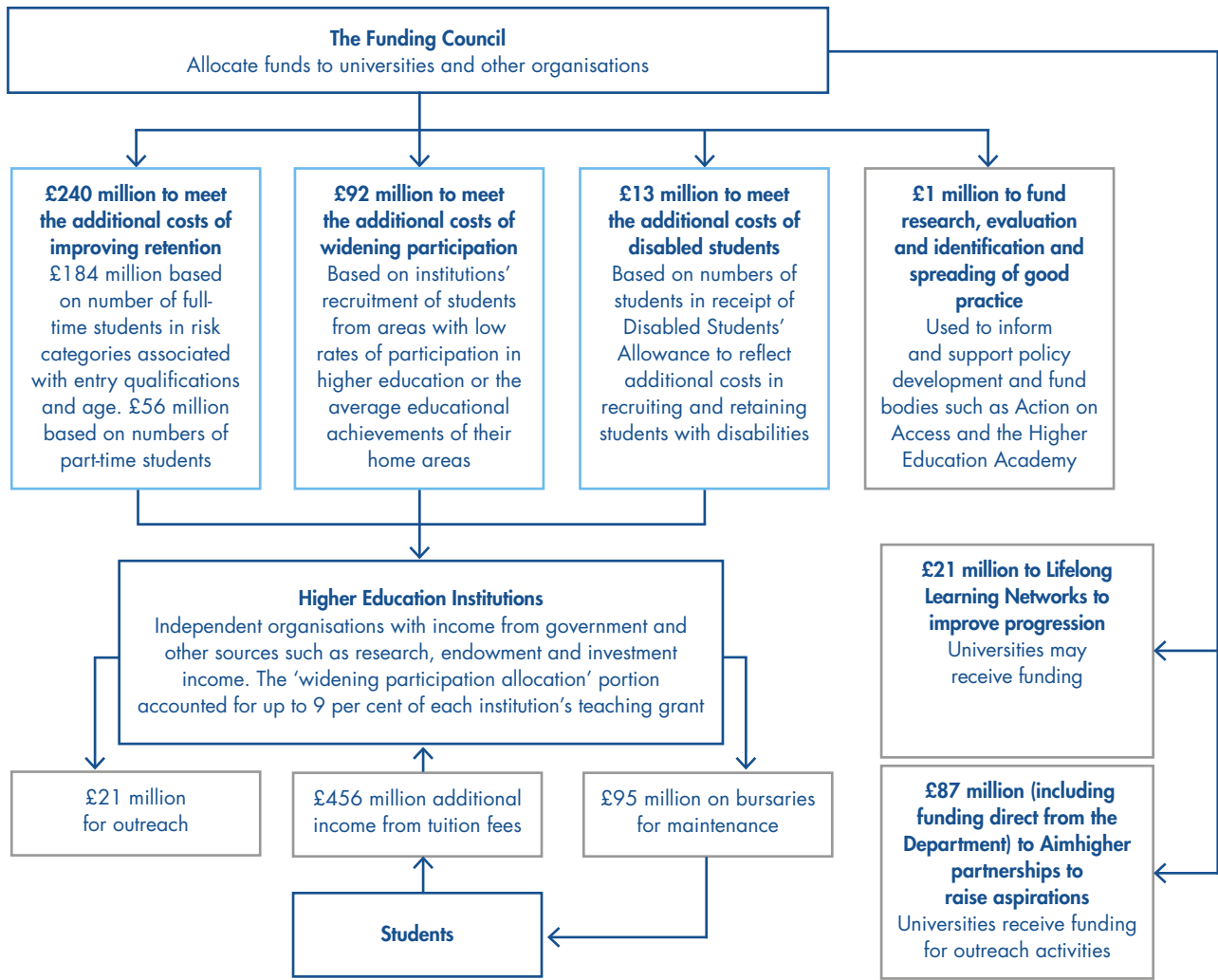


Source: National Audit Office collation of 2007-08 funding data and literature.

3 To assess progress in increasing participation of under-represented groups we undertook a detailed analysis of data held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. To determine the effectiveness of the widening participation initiatives and explore what barriers remain to participation, we carried out surveys of 2,900 unsuccessful applicants for higher education places and of 1,000 teachers in primary and secondary schools, visited seven institutions and met with representatives of key organisations.

4 This report focuses on what higher education institutions can do through outreach and other widening participation activities to raise the aspirations and attainment of people. It does not examine in detail other factors that influence propensity to enter higher education, particularly prior attainment, which have been covered in our earlier reports on *Improving poorly performing schools in England* (January 2006)¹ and *The Academies Programme* (February 2007)².

2 2006-07 funding for widening participation comes from a range of sources



Source: National Audit Office analysis of 2006-07 funding data

What we found

Progress in widening participation

5 Over the past five years there have been improvements in the participation of some groups in higher education, but not for all groups and some remain significantly under-represented in higher education.

The participation rate for men is currently 10 percentage points below that for women. Those from non-white ethnic groups are better represented than white people. Socio-economic background remains a strong determinant of higher education participation with the participation of young, full-time students from lower socio-economic backgrounds having improved by two percentage points over the past four years. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds make up around one half of the population of England, but represent just 29 per cent of young, full-

time, first-time entrants to higher education. Young people living in deprived areas have experienced an increase in participation of 4.5 percentage points since 1998 compared with an increase of 1.8 percentage points in the least deprived areas. White people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, both men and women, are the most under-represented group. There are other groups for whom it is difficult to assess participation because of incomplete data.

6 The attainment of qualifications by students at secondary school or college plays a critical role in gaining access to higher education. Low achievement by some pupils in secondary schools is the principal reason for the difference between rates of participation in higher education for different groups. Notably, all applicants with the necessary qualifications are equally likely to accept a higher education place as others with the same level of attainment, regardless of their family background.

7 Performance indicators show that there is variation across higher education institutions in recruiting students from under-represented groups. For example in 2006-07, around one fifth of institutions performed significantly better than expected in recruiting young people from areas with low participation, whilst a similar proportion performed significantly worse than expected. The Higher Education Statistics Agency publishes performance indicators annually on the composition of students in individual institutions for three under-represented groups: individuals from state schools, from lower socio-economic backgrounds and from areas with low participation in higher education. Each institution has individual benchmarks representing the expected participation for each group, given particular characteristics (such as subject of study, age and entry qualifications) of the students it recruits. Post-1992 institutions generally perform at or significantly above their benchmarks while the English Russell Group institutions (16 of the most research intensive institutions) generally perform at or significantly below their benchmarks. However, the majority of institutions recognise widening participation objectives in their high-level strategies. We found strong senior management support for widening participation, with responsibility usually vested in a pro-Vice Chancellor supported by specialist staff.

8 Incomplete data on student characteristics hinders accurate assessment of participation. Significant gaps in the data provided by students to institutions and programmes reduce the reliance that can be placed on some measures of participation, particularly in relation to socio-economic background and for part-time students. The Department has developed a new measure of participation of young people by social class and is now linking pupil data with higher education student records and admissions data. Both will assist in tracking individuals through widening participation activities and into higher education. The Funding Council is providing more comprehensive data on local participation rates of young people and we found this has been well received by institutions. In general, the long-term nature of widening participation activities makes evaluating their effectiveness difficult.

Impact of the actions of the Department, Funding Council and Office for Fair Access to widen participation

9 The Funding Council contributes to meeting the costs of recruiting students from under-represented groups. It allocates recurrent funding for widening participation to institutions in proportion to the number of existing students from under-represented groups, contributing to the additional costs incurred, and gave £392 million to institutions between 2001-02 and 2007-08. The Funding Council has a broad estimate of the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from under-represented groups and takes this into account in distributing its grant to institutions, but generally does not directly fund widening participation activities in institutions.

10 Since 2006 the Office for Fair Access has approved an 'access agreement' for each institution wishing to charge variable tuition fees, setting out what actions the institution will take to promote and safeguard access for low income groups. The agreements include milestones. If there is a serious and wilful breach of an access agreement, the Office for Fair Access can impose financial sanctions. This may include refusing to renew an institution's access agreement, thus denying it permission to charge tuition fees above the basic level, or instructing the Funding Council to suspend part of an institution's grant. Access agreements have only been in place for two years and the Office for Fair Access has not identified any breaches of access agreements to date.

11 There is insufficient information about institutions' activities to widen participation. The Funding Council no longer requires institutions to report on their widening participation strategies. In the interests of reducing bureaucracy, the access agreements approved by the Office for Fair Access have superseded the requirement to report directly to the Funding Council. The Department, the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access are considering how institutions might bring together their widening participation, fair access and admissions policies into a single strategic document which would be made public.

12 The Funding Council is assessing the effectiveness of the two national programmes with widening participation aims, and our surveys suggest that both programmes are well received by participants, schools and institutions. The Department and the Funding Council fund the Aimhigher programmes of outreach activities broadly aimed at increasing young people's aspirations to study in higher education. The Funding Council has recently introduced measures to improve evaluation and all Aimhigher partnerships are required to submit an evaluation plan for 2008-11. The Funding Council also funds the Lifelong Learning Networks which were set up from 2004 to improve progression for vocational learners. It is too early to determine if they are meeting their objectives but interim evaluations and our review indicate progress is being made. The Funding Council plans a full evaluation in 2009-10 or 2010-11.

13 There are geographical areas with little or no local provision of higher education, whereas increasing numbers of students want to study locally or live at home whilst attending higher education. There has been some progress in increasing provision in such areas, for example through satellite campuses or joint working with further education colleges. Between 2003 and 2007, the Funding Council provided a total of £130 million towards 32 capital projects providing places for an additional 9,000 students. The Funding Council has responded positively to local demand and has recently begun to map provision across England. The Department has announced a new policy, the 'new university challenge' recognising that more needs to be done to expand local and regional higher education.

What higher education institutions are doing to widen participation

14 Institutions received a total of £456 million in additional tuition fee income from students in 2006-07 but the proportion that individual institutions redistributed as bursaries varied considerably, ranging from three per cent to 48 per cent. Bursaries are financial assistance provided to students by institutions. Additionally, 103 out of 123 institutions chose to use part of their tuition fee income to support additional outreach activities in schools or communities, with the aim of encouraging participants to consider higher education. These activities cost an average of £200,000 per institution and amounted to £21 million in total. There is no requirement for institutions to use tuition fee income to fund outreach activities and the Office for Fair Access regards such use as an indication of institutions' commitment to widening participation.

15 Institutions over-estimated the amount of their tuition fee income they would need to cover their student bursary commitments. In 2006-07, the first year of the new tuition fee and student financial support regime, students claimed bursaries totalling £96 million, £19 million less than the £115 million predicted by institutions. Institutions made their predictions cautiously, based on estimates of demand. Limited data on the financial background of students also made forecasting difficult.

16 As many as 12,000 students entering higher education in 2006-07 on full state support did not apply for a bursary although many were likely to have met the necessary criteria. The Office for Fair Access believes students either were not aware of bursaries or did not fully understand if they were eligible. Information on financial assistance is available from a range of diverse sources: individual institutions are responsible for marketing bursaries and various organisations are involved in publicising loans and grants. From 2009-10 the Student Loans Company will take over responsibility for administering all student financial information and plans to introduce an integrated on-line calculator to enable students to determine their eligibility for financial support.

17 Institutions are working with schools to improve pupil progression. The Government recognises the importance of higher education institutions working with schools. In 2007 the Funding Council issued guidance on how institutions and programmes can target activities at low participation areas and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

18 People from lower socio-economic backgrounds and older applicants who are not in school or college are less likely to have access to advice and assistance when applying to higher education. Higher education institutions have recently moved the deadline for applications back by a month, allowing teaching staff more time to advise and produce references for students that they may have taught for a relatively short period. This development in the admissions process is of particular benefit to applicants from under-represented groups who attend further education and sixth-form colleges.

19 A range of new qualifications, modes of delivery and entry support are enabling students from under-represented groups to achieve success in higher education. Some institutions are making use of new practices in learning and teaching, such as foundation degrees and part-time provision, to diversify the way higher education is delivered and widen opportunity. Institutions are working with further education colleges to offer a greater range of higher education opportunities.

Addressing the barriers to widening participation

20 Information, advice and guidance on career options and pathways through education are of variable quality and lack one-to-one engagement. Poor advice and guidance can lead to individuals making poor choices of qualifications to study at school and college, making unrealistic applications to higher education or not applying at all. Young people and their parents need access to people with good knowledge of all the options from age 14. In 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families published new quality standards for young people's information, advice and guidance.

21 Family expectation or tradition of higher education involvement is particularly significant in encouraging young people to undertake higher education. Some families have inaccurate perceptions of higher education and its benefits and may not support young people's aspirations to higher education. We found some examples of institutions working with communities, parents and children of primary school age to address attitudes towards higher education.

22 The relationship between the higher education financial system and the number of applications is a complex one, but the introduction of variable tuition fees and more generous financial support for students does not appear to have reduced the number of applications to higher education. There is no early evidence of a correlation between the level of an institution's bursaries and applications. There has been little research on the impact of tuition fees on those who may have considered but not applied to higher education and some students continue to have a poor understanding of the financial support available.

23 Widening participation activities are embedded in some programmes aimed at older learners, such as Lifelong Learning Networks and employer engagement programmes. The Department estimates that there are about five million adults of working age who have a level three qualification but no experience of higher education, some of whom may benefit from widening participation activities. Part-time students in higher education (who are more likely to be mature) have access to more limited student support, must pay their tuition fees upfront and are often not eligible for bursaries.

Conclusion on Value for Money

The Department's and the Funding Council's expenditure on widening participation cannot be directly related to changes in participation rates as there are other factors affecting participation, in particular the prior attainment of students. Existing analyses suggest that there has been some improvement in participation of some under-represented groups, but progress has not been uniform across the sector. Limited, often qualitative evaluations suggest specific activities are effective at widening participation. There is scope for improving the achievement of value for money through directing activities towards those individuals who would benefit the most and building in evaluation measures when setting up widening participation initiatives.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Many factors influence participation in higher education. The actions of higher education institutions, the Department, the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access cannot widen participation alone. The scope of our report is restricted to what they are able to achieve, and our recommendations are aimed at improving the value for money achieved from their widening participation activities.

a Data on student characteristics is not sufficiently complete or unambiguous to identify accurately the extent to which certain groups are under-represented in higher education. Whilst recognising the steps already being taken to improve the data on student characteristics, the Funding Council and the Department should refine, where practicable, the information needed, such as data on social class, to fully and accurately assess the participation of under-represented groups. They should research the participation of groups about which little is known, such as people with various types of disability and people who have been in care. They should further develop and promote the use of measures which best capture participation rates, such as participation rates in local areas and pupil data linked with higher education student records.

b Survey evidence has indicated which widening participation activities may be most effective but more rigorous evaluation of individual activities is required. The Funding Council and the Department should build on the existing approaches used to evaluate widening participation by adopting more robust approaches to evaluation when setting up activities which aim to widen participation, and use the results to promote and direct those activities which the evidence indicates are the most effective.

c Too little is known about the widening participation activities and expenditure of institutions.

The Department should take forward the introduction of single strategic documents bringing together each institution's widening participation, fair access and admissions policies. Institutions should use the documents to report on their widening participation activities, expenditure and achievements, including an assessment of performance as indicated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency's performance indicators, institutions' own information on these and other under-represented groups not reported on by performance indicators and progress against the objectives set out in the institutions' access agreements. The Funding Council should set standards for reporting of the assessments.

The Office for Fair Access should investigate institutions which do not meet their access agreement commitments and require a plan for improvement if appropriate. Where institutions cannot demonstrate that they are taking reasonable action to improve, the Office for Fair Access should impose appropriate sanctions.

d The availability of higher education is limited in some locations, which may restrict opportunities for individuals from under-represented groups to participate.

Following the Government's 'new university challenge' initiative the Funding Council, in partnership with institutions, should determine how resources should be distributed appropriately to enhance capacity and provision in areas where needed, encouraging institutions to provide more opportunities in those areas where demand remains unmet.

e Some individuals from under-represented groups can have limited access to higher education delivered in traditional ways. The Funding Council should assess demand for further diversification of higher education delivery, for example through foundation degrees, part-time study and schemes that allow transfer of credit between institutions. The Funding Council should use this assessment to inform the direction of funding to support such developments.

f Some students and potential students have limited understanding of the different types of financial support available to them.

The Department should support and promote the development of a single source of comprehensive information for potential applicants, students, parents and teachers on the sources of, and application processes, for all Government grants, loans and bursaries. The information provided should allow individuals to determine their eligibility for financial support according to their personal circumstances.



PART ONE

Progress in widening participation

1.1 The Government has a policy to widen participation by helping more people from under-represented groups, particularly lower socio-economic backgrounds, to participate successfully in higher education.³ Despite an overall rise in the number of young people taking part in higher education, some groups remain under-represented compared with the general population. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (the Funding Council) has given institutions delivering higher education £392 million between 2001-02 and 2007-08 in recurrent funding for widening participation (excluding funding to improve the retention of students), to broaden the diversity of the student population by encouraging applicants from under-represented groups.

Increasing participation in higher education

1.2 Participation in higher education in England has increased over recent decades. The Department's measure of participation shows that when students up to the age of 60 are included, the current participation rate stands at 48.7 per cent. However, participation of young people (17-30 year olds) has fluctuated from 39.2 per cent in 1999-2000 to a peak of 42.5 per cent in 2005-06. It currently stands at 39.8 per cent in 2006-07 (**Figure 3 overleaf**).

1.3 Scotland and Northern Ireland have higher rates of participation of 18 and 19 year olds while England and Wales have shown little change over the same period (**Figure 4 overleaf**).

Participation of specific groups

1.4 Not all relevant groups in society are represented in higher education in proportion to their representation in the population as a whole. Previous research and our own analysis have shown that some important groups are under-represented (**Box 1 on page 14**). Women are better represented than men and those from non-white ethnic groups are better represented than white people. 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. White people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, both men and women, are the most under-represented group. There are other groups for whom it is difficult to assess participation because of incomplete data.

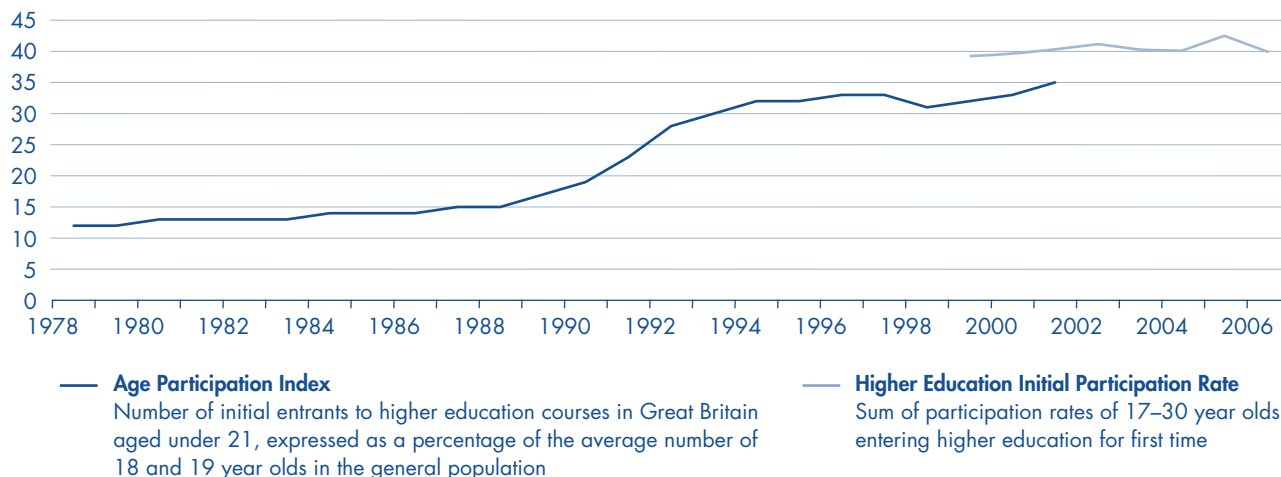
1.5 Performance indicators published annually show improving trends in the proportion of students from three areas: those from working class backgrounds, low participation neighbourhoods and those from state schools and colleges (**Figure 5 on page 13**). Performance indicators can show an increase in the student population but do not show change relative to the general population, and have limited value for demonstrating changes in participation rates.

1.6 Family income is another indicator of a student's background. The Student Loans Company collects data on family income in order to determine entitlement to statutory student support. In 2006-07 new students became eligible to apply for a means tested maintenance grant. Of those applying, one third received a full grant of £2,700 (**Figure 6 on page 13**), indicating that they came from households with annual income under £17,910. This is broadly consistent with the proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Figure 5), although socio-economic background is derived from parental occupation rather than household income.

3 Trend in higher education participation

Participation in higher education has increased over the past 30 years

Proportion (per cent)



Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Funding Council performance indicators, and Hansard <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo060126/text/60126w13.htm>

NOTES

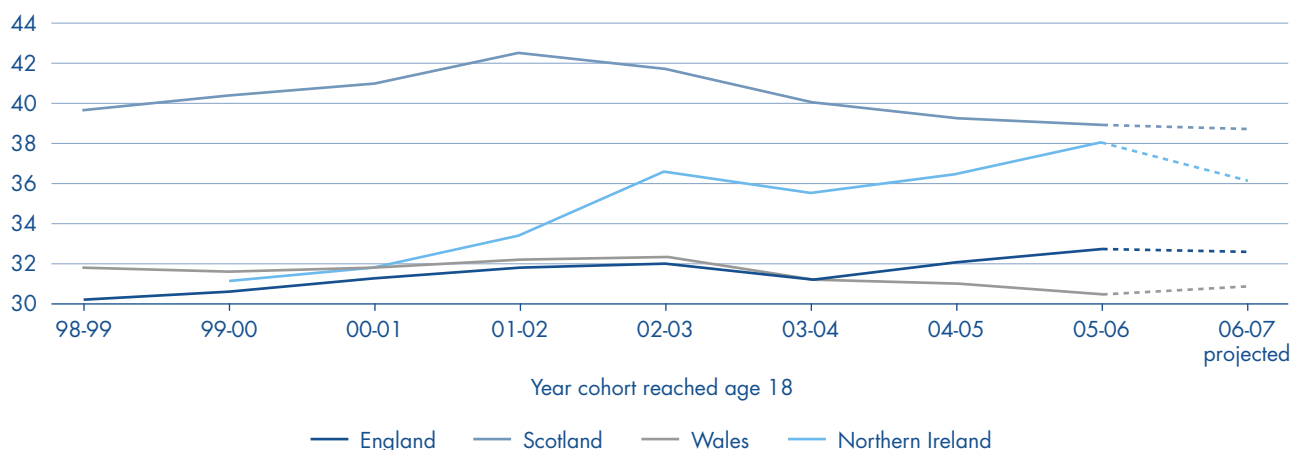
This graph illustrates two different measures of participation – the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) for 1999-00 to 2006-07 for England and the Age Participation Index (API) for 1978-79 to 2001-02 for Great Britain. The measures are not directly comparable as they measure different things but they show the overall increase in participation over the period.

The Higher Education Initial Participation Rate is the sum of the participation rates of 17-30 year olds joining full or part-time courses in publicly funded higher education institutions in the United Kingdom for the first time. It does not include students studying overseas. It is the measure used to monitor progress towards the 50 per cent participation target.

The Age Participation Index is defined as the number of UK domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate higher education courses in Great Britain, aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19 year olds in the general population.

4 Participation rate of 18–19 year olds within the UK varies between the countries

Young participation by age 19 (per cent)



Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England provisional results from forthcoming 'Trends in young participation' report

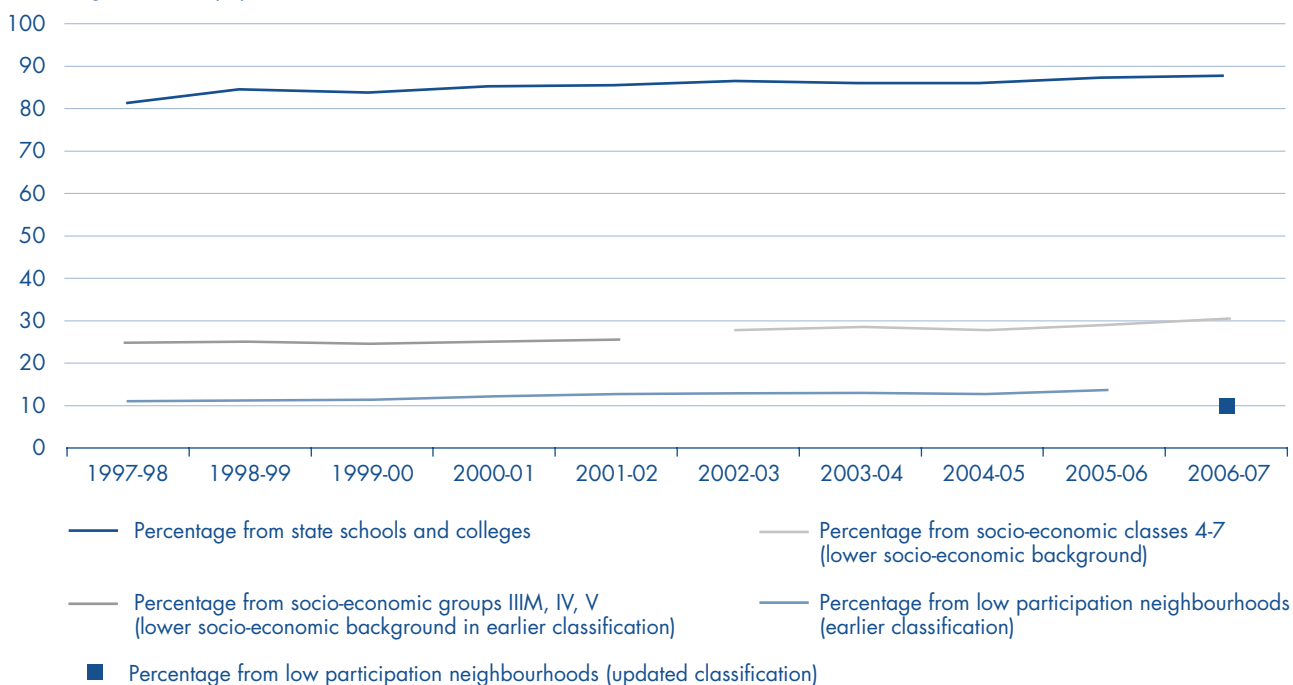
NOTE

Participation rates indicate the proportion of a cohort that start a higher education course in a UK higher education institution or Great Britain Further Education College at age 18 or, a year later, at age 19. The convention used is to label the cohorts in which they are 18; 05-06 relates to 18 year olds on 31 August 2005 (in England) who enter higher education in the academic years 2005-06 (aged 18) or 2006-07 (aged 19). Data based on the new young participation definition used for POLAR2 (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/polar/polar2/>).

5 Proportions of young, full-time undergraduate students from selected groups in higher education

A gradual improving trend for all groups over the last nine years

Percentage of student population



Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency and Funding Council performance indicator data

NOTE

Young, UK domiciled entrants to full-time, undergraduate courses in English higher education institutions.

6 Number and proportion of students receiving maintenance grants in 2006-07

Around one-third of students applying for statutory student support received a full maintenance grant

Household income	Number of students
Up to £17,910 and receive full grant	98,000 (33%)
Between £17,911 and £38,330 and receive partial grant	68,000 (23%)
£38,331 or more and receive no grant	127,000 (43%)
Total	293,000 (100%)
Did not apply	Unknown

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Student Loans Company 2006-07 data

NOTE

Information relates to students domiciled in England attending all UK higher education institutions.

Causes of low participation

1.7 Low achievement by pupils in school is the principal explanation for the difference between rates of participation in higher education for young students from different socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of students accepting full-time places in higher education increases with attainment: 73 per cent of students with qualifications equivalent to two grade Cs at A level accept a place, compared with 91 per cent of those with qualifications equivalent to one grade A and two grade Bs at A level. We found that there are virtually no differences in acceptance rates by socio-economic background when prior attainment is accounted for (**Figure 7 on page 16**).

1.8 Socio-economic background has a strong influence on attainment at school. The 20 per cent of pupils who live in the most deprived wards in England make up only 11 per cent of those who attain five or more GCSEs, the prerequisite for progressing on to study A levels.⁴ GCSE attainment can predict the likelihood of participation in higher education.⁵ Two-thirds of those with five or more GCSEs are in higher education by age 19 compared with 12 per cent of those without.⁶

BOX 1

Participation trends of particular groups over the past five years

The participation of people in higher education varies for different groups. Some groups are inter-related, in particular gender, socio-economic background and ethnicity.

	Population sub-group	Description of trend from 2001-02 to 2005-06	Relative to general English population	Overall trend
Gender	Women (aged 17-30)	In general, participation rates for women are higher than those for men for all ages from 17 to 30. ¹ However, white females from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly under-represented compared with average female participation rates. Females from non-white ethnic backgrounds appear well-represented.	Well-represented 	Increasing Widening gap between males and females
	Men (aged 17-30)	In general, men are under-represented in higher education. The proportion of men in higher education has remained relatively static over the past five years. ¹ Men from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly under-represented, in particular those from white ethnic backgrounds. Men from non-white groups, whether from lower or upper socio-economic backgrounds appear well-represented.	Representation requires improvement 	Static
Socio-economic background	Lower socio-economic backgrounds aged under 21	Socio-economic background appears to affect participation over and above other factors such as ethnicity and gender. People from lower socio-economic groups appear significantly under-represented. The proportion of the 18–20 year old population of England in higher education has increased by two percentage points to 20 per cent since 2002. ²	Representation requires improvement 	Increasing slowly with a narrower gap between the social classes.
	Upper socio-economic backgrounds aged under 21	44.6 per cent of the 18–20 year old English population entered higher education for the first time in 2002, compared with 43.3 per cent in 2005. ² Despite this fall, more than twice the proportion from upper socio-economic backgrounds go to higher education than from lower socio-economic backgrounds although the gap between the two groups is narrowing.	Well-represented 	Decreasing
Ethnicity	Minority ethnic groups as a whole	Overall, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are well-represented and are more likely to enter higher education compared to white people. White-British remain the most under-represented ethnic group over the last five years. The participation of young entrants (under 21) remains static but the participation of those aged 21-29 is increasing. Some sub-groups of black students are under-represented at young ages (under 21) but well-represented at ages 21-29. This reflects later entry to higher education. Other ethnic groups such as Indian, Chinese, Pakistani and Bangladeshi are well-represented.	Generally well-represented but some sub-groups are under-represented. 	Static

BOX 1 CONTINUED

Participation trends of particular groups over the past five years

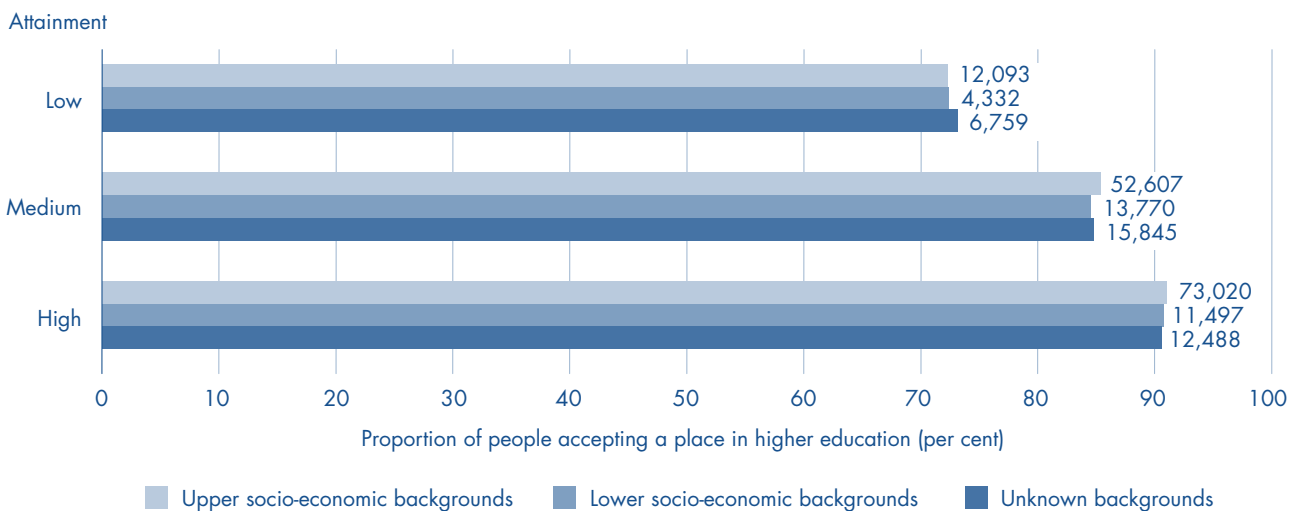
	Population sub-group	Description of trend from 2001-02 to 2005-06	Relative to general English population	Overall trend
Ethnicity <i>continued</i>	White people from lower socio-economic backgrounds	White people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly under-represented in higher education. Women are better represented than men, but are still significantly under-represented compared to the general population.	Representation requires improvement 	Static
Deprivation	Young people living in deprived areas	Young people living in deprived areas have experienced an increase of 4.5 percentage points since 1998 for the most deprived 20 per cent of areas compared with an increase of 1.8 percentage points in the 20 per cent least deprived areas for young English entrants. ³ They remain, however, significantly under-represented compared to the general population.	Representation requires improvement 	Increasing with a narrower gap
Groups with limited data				
	People leaving care	Academic achievement at GCSE and A level suggests that this group are likely to be significantly under-represented. ⁴ There is limited quantitative evidence but the Funding Council and the sector recognise that they are a group to target.	Inconclusive	Unknown
	People with disabilities	Differences in the way disability is defined and recorded make accurate assessment difficult: an individual's disability status can change over time making comparisons problematic, there are different ways of recording disability and there are different forms of disability, each with different participation rates. Our analyses found a general increase in the proportion of students declaring a disability from four to six per cent over the past five years for young people (under 21), compared with around four per cent in the general population over the same period based on Labour Force Survey data. Different approaches to obtaining population estimates can, however, lead to different conclusions.	Inconclusive	Appears to be increasing

Source: National Audit Office analysis

NOTES

- 1 Based on Higher Education Initial Participation Rate. Participation rates in higher education: academic years 1999-00 to 2006-07 (provisional).
- 2 Based on Full-Time Young Participation by Socio-economic Class. It covers English domiciled full-time, young (under 21) students.
- 3 Measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. Higher Education Funding Council for England provisional results from forthcoming *Trends in young participation* report.
- 4 Department for Children, Schools and Families, statistical release, SFR 27/2007. Table G1.

7 Acceptance rates by socio-economic background and prior attainment 2006



Source: National Audit Office analysis of UCAS 2006 data

NOTES

1 Bar height indicates proportion of young applicants who accept a full-time place in higher education, numbers above bars indicate actual number of applicants who accept a place. Attainment has been categorised into low, medium and high according to UCAS tariff points obtained at A level or equivalent: 'low' is less than 160 (equivalent to less than two grade Cs at A level), 'medium' is 160-319, 'high' is over 320 (equivalent to more than one grade A and two grade Bs at A level).

2 English applicants for full-time courses, of all ages, at English higher education institutions.

1.9 Whilst prior attainment is the over-riding determinant of entry to higher education, an individual may choose other routes for a number of reasons: personal circumstances, attitude to education, the structure of educational provision, and financial reasons.⁷

For individuals from some communities, alternatives to higher education are more highly valued.⁸ A recent report found that many who do not participate in higher education do not value its benefits and instead opt for the identity, social status, and income derived from employment.⁹ This report does not examine these factors, but focuses on what the Funding Council, the Department and institutions are doing to widen participation.

Progression through courses

1.10 Young people from low-participation neighbourhoods are more vulnerable to non-continuation than those from other neighbourhoods. Around 9.4 per cent of young, full-time, first degree students from low-participation neighbourhoods starting in 2004-05 did not re-register on a higher education course in the following academic year, compared with 6.3 per cent of those from other neighbourhoods.¹⁰ The National Audit Office report on the retention of students in higher education, published in July 2007, showed that a difference in continuation rates remained even after controlling for factors such as prior attainment, and that many institutions were actively addressing the support needs of less well-prepared entrants.¹¹

Quality of data on student characteristics

1.11 Gaps in the data held on students have an impact on the reliability of the estimates of participation. Each institution submits a record for every student to the Higher Education Statistics Agency on an annual basis. Not every student record is complete as students are not obliged to reveal personal characteristics defined as sensitive and personal by the Data Protection Act, such as ethnicity and social class, on registering. Social class is usually constructed from the description of parental occupation on the UCAS application form. Applicants may not provide an accurate description of their parents' occupations and UCAS must attempt to code answers to standard occupational classifications, with a consequent risk of error. Over one third of full-time student records have unknown and missing socio-economic data each year (**Figure 8**). UCAS application data is also incomplete, with 20 per cent missing information on socio-economic background. However, data coverage on full-time students is much higher than for part-time students who do not apply through the UCAS system. There is very little socio-economic data for part-time students (6.6 per cent complete in 2006-07).

8 Percentage of data that is missing in the student data for 2002 to 2006

The data on under-graduate student characteristics is missing in many cases, especially in relation to socio-economic background.

	2002 (%)	2003 (%)	2004 (%)	2005 (%)	2006 (%)
Full-time					
Socio-economic background (all ages)	39.3	33.6	34.0	34.8	34.1
Socio-economic background (18-19 year olds)	25.8	18.0	18.9	22.6	21.3
Ethnicity	4.7	4.4	3.2	3.1	3.0
Disability	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2
Age	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Part-time					
Socio-economic background	98.9	98.5	97.5	93.6	93.4
Ethnicity	14.4	14.3	11.5	12.0	10.7
Disability	2.6	2.3	22.4	27.0	28.6
Age	4.6	3.0	2.5	1.5	1.1

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency student data

NOTE

Full and part-time undergraduates, from England in UK higher education institutions. The sharp rise in missing disability data between 2003 and 2004 is believed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency to relate to a change in reporting by the Open University.

1.12 The gaps in the data make it difficult to say with confidence whether small variations in the participation rates of particular groups (either between each other or over time) represent real changes in participation. The indicators used to monitor the performance of institutions are restricted in their coverage because of the scale of missing data, for example socio-economic background is only used for young, full-time students, not for mature or part-time students. Institutions which report the highest levels of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to have poorer data coverage than those reporting lower proportions. Difficulties with making accurate population estimates and interpreting socio-economic data compound the problems with measuring participation. In 2006 the Department introduced a more refined measure of participation by socio-economic background, Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC), to try to minimize the problems caused by missing data, and the Funding Council is promoting measurement of participation by area as a more reliable means of monitoring participation.

1.13 Many items of data which would be useful for monitoring equity of participation are not available. For example, there is no data on whether the student is a parent or has care responsibilities. The Department has made progress in linking together the data it holds on school pupils and higher education students, but the task has been complicated by the lack of a common student identification number. Improvements are being made in recording participation of first-generation higher education students and individuals who have been through care; from 2008 these questions are asked of applicants for full-time courses. There are also ongoing discussions about the sharing of income data between the Student Loans Company and the Department.



Impact of actions by the Department, Funding Council and Office for Fair Access to widen participation

2.1 This part of the report examines the actions of the Department, the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access to widen participation in higher education. It considers:

- funding of widening participation;
- monitoring performance in widening participation;
- programmes to widen participation:
 - i Aimhigher and other outreach activities;
 - ii Lifelong Learning Networks; and
 - iii local provision of higher education.

Funding of widening participation

2.2 One of the Funding Council's four core aims is to "promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it". The Funding Council allocates funding to:

- higher and further education institutions directly to contribute to meeting the costs of widening participation (£95 million in 2007-08);
- specific programmes which aim to widen participation (£0.75 million in 2007-08);
- a programme of research and evaluation to inform and support policy (£1.5 million in 2007-08); and
- organisations to identify and share good practice, for example Action on Access and the Higher Education Academy.

2.3 The Funding Council works with higher education institutions. Its governing Board includes members drawn from higher and further education institutions making up around half of its members. The members of the Board's Widening Participation Committee, responsible for advising on the effectiveness of its widening participation strategies, predominantly comprises university and college representatives (13 of the 18 members).

2.4 The total Funding Council grant available to support institutions in 2007-08 is £7.1 billion, representing institutions' largest source of income. Some £95.3 million is allocated for widening participation to cover the additional costs of recruiting students from areas with low rates of participation in higher education or low average rates of educational achievement. The allocations are based on the number of registered students from areas with low rates of participation of young people, or areas with high proportions of adults without a higher education qualification, and reflect institutions' relative performance in recruiting students from such areas. Institutions that are more successful in recruiting students from such backgrounds receive proportionally more money. Many of the institutions' outreach activities benefit the sector more widely. Unless an institution needs to recruit more students to fill its places, there is no financial incentive to undertake outreach activities, although such activities may support the institution's mission and may improve its reputation through, for example, performance indicators.

2.5 We could not determine how institutions had spent income to support their widening participation activities. A report commissioned by the Funding Council in 2003 found that "institutions rarely had a full set of cost data available" and that estimates of spending were likely to be understated. The report estimated the costs per fundable full-time equivalent students identified as part of the widening participation cohort as ranging from £345 to £1,776, with an average of £879. This was based on financial data on outreach, recruitment, retention, staff training, management and the institutional learning and teaching framework from 18 case study institutions.¹²

2.6 The widening participation allocation forms a part of the learning and teaching grant and is not ring-fenced. The Funding Council allocates grants to institutions based on their overall levels of teaching activity (student places) and makes grant adjustments if places are not filled. The Funding Council does not require institutions to report on how they spend their grant on activities aimed at

widening participation or on what activities they conduct. The Funding Council believes accountability is achieved through its monitoring of performance in recruiting students from under-represented groups rather than through monitoring expenditure. It has a number of mechanisms to ensure that allocations are based on accurate data including validation and credibility checks, data audits and reconciliations between different data sources.¹³

2.7 Until 2003-04, the widening participation element of funding was conditional upon the institutions providing acceptable strategies and action plans. Under the Higher Education Act 2004, institutions wishing to vary their full-time undergraduate tuition fees must submit access agreements to the Office for Fair Access. The Office for Fair Access was set up in 2004 with a budget of £0.5 million with the primary aim of increasing applications and entrants from low income and other under-represented groups, following the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006-07. It requires all institutions charging full-time, undergraduate tuition fees above the basic amount to have an approved access agreement that sets out their measures for promoting and safeguarding access through bursaries, scholarships and outreach activity.

2.8 In order to minimise the administrative burden, the Department withdrew its requirement for strategies and action plans. In consequence there is little information on how much institutions spend on widening participation and how they distribute their funding to support their aims and objectives. The further development of the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC)¹⁴ for teaching may in due course provide further information about the costs of widening participation activities.

Monitoring performance in widening participation

2.9 Public Service Agreements set out the Government's key priorities for the 2008-11 spending period, alongside indicators to measure progress. The Department has one widening participation indicator, announced in 2007: to narrow 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.¹⁵ The Department additionally monitors other under-represented groups. There is also an indicator at the Local Authority level for young people from low income backgrounds progressing to higher education.

2.10 The Funding Council's Widening Participation Committee advises the Funding Council and is supported by a team of widening participation programme staff. The team monitors progress towards key widening participation performance targets outlined in the Funding Council's operating plan and reports quarterly to the Board. The Funding Council's regional teams provide the frontline communication with the institutions.

Performance indicators at the institution level

2.11 The Performance Indicators Steering Group consists of representatives of the funding bodies, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, government departments, higher education institutions, and other interested bodies. It was set up in 1998 to develop performance indicators for higher education institutions. It now oversees the publication of existing indicators, and considers whether and how new indicators should be developed. Between 1999 and 2003 the Funding Council, and since 2004 the Higher Education Statistics Agency, on behalf of the Steering Group, have calculated and published annually a number of performance indicators of participation in higher education (**Box 2**), along with adjusted sector benchmarks. The benchmarks represent average performance across the sector adjusted to reflect the student profile of the institution, taking into account subject of study, entry qualifications and age. They are designed as comparator figures for the indicators, allowing institutions to assess their own performance and compare themselves with other similar institutions.

BOX 2

Performance indicators measure the composition of the student population in higher education

For young (under 21), full-time students there are three performance indicators:

- percentage of entrants who attended school/college in state sector;
- percentage of entrants whose parents are from socio-economic groups 4-7 (lower socio-economic backgrounds); and
- percentage of entrants from postcodes with low proportion of 18- and 19-year-olds in higher education (low participation neighbourhoods).

For mature students (21 and over), and for part-time students (all ages), only the performance indicator relating to neighbourhoods is calculated for those students with no previous higher education qualification.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency website

2.12 Appendix 2 includes a more complete description of benchmarks and presents the performance of all higher education institutions in England against their adjusted sector benchmarks from academic years 2002-03 to 2006-07. We found that overall the indicators show an increase in the number of institutions performing significantly above their individual benchmarks for attracting young students from state schools and lower socio-economic backgrounds between 2005-06 and 2006-07. In 2006-07 more institutions performed significantly above their benchmarks for participation of students from low participation neighbourhoods than those which performed significantly below (**Figure 9**).

2.13 The proportions across the sector are not even. There were higher concentrations of entrants from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the post-1992 universities (those granted university status after 1992), and lower concentrations in the Russell Group institutions (association of research intensive universities). Even after the prior attainment of admitted students is taken into account, there is still a difference in participation rates by type of institution (**Figure 10**). On average, universities from the Russell Group institutions performed significantly below their benchmarks, and post-1992 institutions performed significantly above theirs. For small or specialist and pre-1992 institutions (excluding Russell Group), performance is on average not significantly different from their benchmarks.

2.14 The benchmarks are not targets and institutions do not receive financial rewards or sanctions based on their performance. The publication of performance information

enables institutions to monitor their performance and provides them with an incentive to perform well to enhance their reputations. The institutions we visited closely monitored their achievement against their benchmarks and responded accordingly if performance was falling short.

The role of the Office for Fair Access in monitoring

2.15 The Office for Fair Access monitors annual progress against access agreement milestones. If an institution does not meet its access agreement obligations on the payment of bursaries, the level of fees, or satisfactory progress towards milestones, the Office for Fair Access has a duty to investigate and can report its findings in its annual report. It has two sanctions it can impose where the seriousness of the breach warrants, and an institution has not made all reasonable efforts to comply:

- Refuse to renew an institution's access agreement, thus denying it permission to charge full-time, undergraduate students tuition fees above the basic level for a period, determined by the Director of the Office for Fair Access, after its access agreement has expired.
- Instruct the Funding Council to either suspend part of an institution's grant until restitution has been made, or deduct a fine from the grant.

9

2006-07 performance indicators show that more institutions are over-performing than under-performing against their adjusted sector benchmarks, and there has been a slight overall improvement since 2005-06

	Number of institutions that were:					
	significantly above benchmark		not significantly different to benchmark		significantly below benchmark	
	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07
Young full-time students from state schools	33 (28%)	41 (34%)	62 (53%)	52 (43%)	22 (19%)	27 (23%)
Young full-time students from lower socio-economic backgrounds	23 (20%)	27 (23%)	70 (61%)	70 (59%)	22 (19%)	21 (18%)
Young full-time students from low participation neighbourhoods	–	24 (20%)	–	77 (63%)	–	21 (17%)
Mature full-time students from low participation neighbourhoods	–	26 (22%)	–	66 (56%)	–	25 (21%)

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency 2005-06 and 2006-07 data, low participation neighbourhood indicators for English domiciled, young, full-time students and mature, full-time students, tables T1b and T2a

NOTE

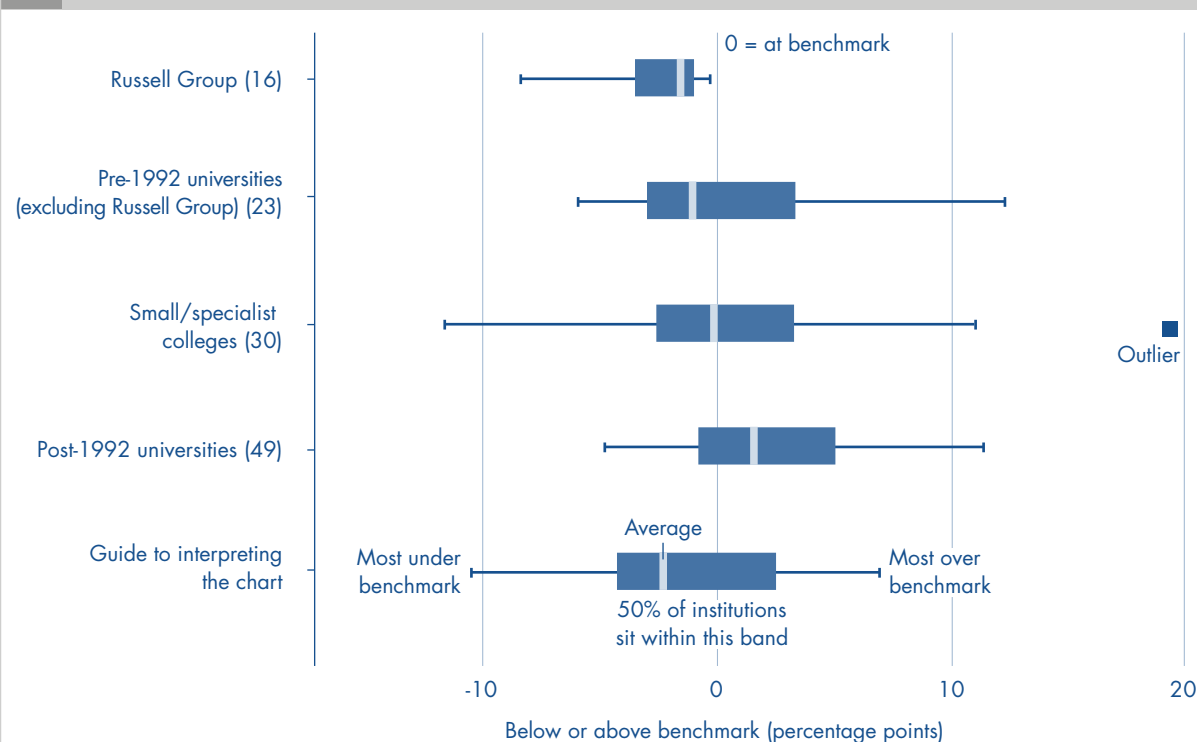
Data on the low participation neighbourhood indicators is not presented for 2005-06 because of a significant difference in the method of calculation introduced in 2006-07, described in Appendix 2, resulting in the data from the two years being non-comparable.

2.16 An institution's failure to meet its milestones is not sufficient to trigger a sanction, but the Office for Fair Access will consider what actions an institution has taken or intends to take when the access agreement comes up for renewal. It can also refuse to approve an access agreement with milestones which are not stretching enough.

The Office for Fair Access returned draft access agreements that did not have at least one milestone with a commitment to making or maintaining progress. Since 2006, it has not found it necessary to use any of its sanctions. During 2009, an independent commission will evaluate the impact of access agreements. An independent review will also examine the first three years of the new system of variable fees and student support including bursaries.

2.17 The Department has asked the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access for advice on how institutions could bring together their widening participation, fair access and admissions policies into a single strategic document which would be made public. The Department has sought advice on how they, the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access could use existing powers and responsibilities to support institutions to implement their joined-up strategies and how institutions might be reassured that they have the necessary expertise and resources to fully implement their strategies.

10 Participation of young full-time undergraduate entrants from lower socio-economic backgrounds by institution type taking into account institutional benchmarks for 2006-07



	Number of institutions (per cent) that were:		
	significantly above benchmark	not significantly different to benchmark	significantly below benchmark
All institutions	27 (23%)	70 (59%)	21 (18%)
Russell Group	0 (0%)	8 (50%)	8 (50%)
Post-1992	16 (33%)	30 (61%)	3 (6%)
Pre-1992 (excluding Russell Group)	6 (26%)	8 (35%)	9 (39%)
Small/specialist	5 (17%)	24 (80%)	1 (3%)

Source: National Audit Office analysis of the Higher Education Statistics Agency's 2006-07 performance indicator data, Table T1b

NOTE

The figure presents the distribution of institutional performance against benchmark for 2006-07 for UK domiciled students at English higher education institutions from socio-economic groups 4-7, for those institutions for which data is available. Zero represents performance on benchmark. Positive numbers indicate better performance than expected, and negative numbers indicate worse performance than expected.

Programmes to widen participation

2.18 The Funding Council does not deliver services to widen participation but provides funding for universities, colleges and others to do so. Specifically, it funds:

- i) outreach through Aimhigher partnerships (£87 million in 2006-07) and the widening participation portion of its grant to institutions;
- ii) Lifelong Learning Networks to develop progression routes for vocational learners (£104 million up to 2010-11); and
- iii) institutions to develop and provide local higher education in areas of low provision (£130 million since 2003-04).

i) Aimhigher and other outreach activities

2.19 Institutions work with schools and colleges through outreach activities which aim to build up learner knowledge about the higher education environment, overturn misconceptions about entitlement to higher education, and in some cases to enhance attainment. It can be delivered directly by the institutions, through local partnerships such as Aimhigher, or through specialist bodies such as the Further Mathematics Network. Outreach can take many forms, for example:

- academic staff delivering master-classes and taster days;
- higher education students mentoring school or college students;
- pupils attending open days, events and classes on campuses; and
- residential summer schools.

The Aimhigher programme

2.20 The Department introduced Aimhigher in 2001 as an outreach programme designed to raise the awareness, aspirations and attainment of young people.¹⁶ The programme targets young people, particularly in the 13-19 age range, from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds, those with disabilities and young people in care. It involves a wide range of collaborative activities between schools, colleges and higher education institutions, and supports the provision of information, advice and guidance to potential students, their teachers and families.

2.21 Most of Aimhigher's funding for 2007-08 (£71.6 million) goes to area partnerships and the balance to regions (funding to regions ends in July 2008). Funding is continuing up to 2011, with Aimhigher partnerships set to receive £239.5 million in the period 2008-2011. Partnerships allocate a proportion of funding to schools or colleges within an area. The amount allocated to schools is not ring-fenced, varies locally and in the period 2006-08 averages 38 per cent of partnership budgets nationally. The Funding Council does not require schools to bid for the funding or report on how their funding has been spent, consistent with the Government's 'new relationship with schools' which prohibits the ring-fencing of funding to schools through the Department for Children, Schools and Families' standards fund. Aimhigher Area Steering Groups, comprising members from further and higher education, schools, local authorities and work-based training providers, agree funding for the work identified in their approved plan, although the Steering Groups may have little influence on the activities delivered in schools. The Funding Council has suggested that area partnerships should adjust allocations to individual schools that do not use them to engage fully with the aims and activities agreed by the partnership.

Summer schools

2.22 During the period 2003-08 the Funding Council and the European Social Fund are jointly funding a regional summer school programme and collecting participant data. A recent review of the South West Aimhigher regional partnership found that summer schools were highly regarded by participants and that they were effective in replicating the higher education experience. The review found that, compared with those who had taken part in non-residential widening participation activities, summer school participants were more likely to apply to higher education (32 per cent compared with 25 per cent).¹⁷ Local Aimhigher partnerships also organise summer schools in collaboration with institutions. For example, the University of Worcester hosts a residential sports summer school and the University of Sheffield runs a week-long Headstart Engineering Summer school for 40 sixth-form students from across the UK.

Student ambassadors

2.23 Many institutions train and pay students to act as ambassadors, mentors and role models in local schools. We found that they were highly regarded by schools, with pupils relating well to students who are likely to be only a few years older than themselves. Institutions believe that one-to-one support enhances attainment as well as aspiration. Evaluation is limited at this stage but there are early indicators of improved achievement and progression (**Box 3**).

2.24 In April 2008, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills announced £21 million funding over three years for a new national support scheme, 'Aimhigher Associates'. The Department plans to recruit higher education students to provide long-term individual and face-to-face support to pupils in schools and colleges across the country.

Pre-entry programmes

2.25 Some institutions offer pre-entry programmes to bring applicants' study skills and baseline knowledge up to entry level, for example the University of Lancaster's Passport to Higher Education course (**Box 4**).

Primary schools and families

2.26 From our survey of school teachers we estimate that around 30 per cent of primary schools have participated in widening participation activities. Growing recognition that disengagement with education starts from an early age has led to an increase in activities aimed at pupils of primary school age. For example, at the national level the Aimhigher 'Professor Fluffy' project developed by the University of Liverpool is targeted at nine and ten year olds. We also found examples of institutions targeting younger pupils and involving parents (**Box 5 overleaf**).

Longer-term activities

2.27 Practitioners conducting outreach activities told us that they regard longer-term activities to be more effective than one-off events. Action on Access is developing with Aimhigher partnerships and institutions a 'learner progression framework' to enable institutions to offer more integrated support, building over time, with a focus on key transition points at ages 14, 16 and 18.¹⁸ This is a shift from one-off interventions to a planned programme of activities for a specific cohort of individuals (**Box 6 overleaf**).

Evaluating the impact of outreach

2.28 The nature of outreach work is long-term and it is difficult to demonstrate that any rise in higher education participation is linked to specific activities. In its evaluation of the Aimhigher programme in 2006, the National Foundation for Educational Research¹⁹ surveyed young people who had taken part in Aimhigher activities such as summer schools and mentoring in the previous few years. It found that participation in Aimhigher-related activities was associated with aspirations and intentions to continue to higher education, though it was too early

BOX 3

Early results from a small mentoring programme

Students from the University of Worcester mentor pupils studying for their GCSEs at a school in a deprived area. Pupils are selected by their teachers on the basis of their predicted grades (on the C/D border) and their vulnerability to lose focus. The school considers that mentoring played a vital role in keeping some of the pupils on track, and encouraging and enabling others. The school found that of those pupils who were mentored in one year group, a greater number of pupils achieved more A*-C grades at GCSE than predicted.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Worcester

BOX 4

Preparing for higher education

Five partner institutions developed the four week accredited Passport to Higher Education programme, run by the University of Lancaster. It provides a bridge between school or college and higher education, by providing additional academic qualifications and experience. The options include a combination of study skills modules and academic modules.

The Passport Certificate is awarded to students who successfully complete two academic modules and the four Preparation for Higher Education modules (in face-to-face, distance learning or on-line format). Many institutions accept this award alongside other Level 3 qualifications as supplementary evidence of ability and potential to succeed in higher education.

The programme is free to learners that meet certain criteria, most of which relate to under-represented groups, for example first in family to enter higher education, receipt of state benefits, or those with a disability that affects study.¹

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Lancaster

to say whether the activities had led to an increase in participation. Conversely, an evaluation comparing Local Authorities which had implemented Aimhigher with those that had not, found no positive and statistically significant effect on further or higher education participation rates (and educational attainment) for young individuals.²⁰ An evaluation by the South Yorkshire Aimhigher partnership found immediate benefits from its school roadshows (Box 7).

BOX 5

Examples where institutions are starting contact with schools earlier

The **University of Sheffield** targets Year 9 and above through the Sheffield's Outreach and Access to Medicine Scheme (SOAMS). The programme is targeted at Year 9, first-generation potential students who need to study locally or have personal circumstances which are likely to limit their chances of entering higher education. The programme includes an introduction to the medical student experience, attainment raising activities, interview practice, e-mentoring opportunities, summer schools, revision workshops and sessions with parents. On average around 30 per cent of the 90–100 participants who start on SOAMS in Year 9 progress onto Phase 2 of the programme when they reach Year 12. At this stage they also accept a few additional students from local colleges directly into Phase 2. Around 20–25 per cent of participants on Phase 2 ultimately progress onto Sheffield Medical School, with nearly all of the Phase 2 students progressing onto a higher education course, either at Sheffield or elsewhere.

The **University of Worcester** uses sport as a vehicle to engage young people and their families. They have a national league basketball team which visits schools and colleges to raise the profile of higher education. Local youngsters and parents visit the campus to watch the basketball games, raising their familiarity with a higher education environment. They also encourage under-10s to play in football tournaments on University sports fields.

Sheffield Hallam University has a range of early outreach activities focused on Year 8–Year 10s and uses student ambassadors in all activities. It also has outreach tailored to address parental concerns, for example University Experience Evenings, targeting Year 9 pupils and parents. The University has now also commenced a programme of Aimhigher 'Professor Fluffy' activity with Year 5s.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Sheffield, University of Worcester and Sheffield Hallam University

BOX 6

Example of a long-term scheme for young people

The **University of Reading** runs an Aimhigher funded programme 'Making Progress' for pupils aged 14–17, aimed at schools with low average attainment, in low participation areas and in deprived areas. Some 10 per cent of 14–15 year olds in 23 state schools located in the more deprived neighbourhoods in Berkshire are usually chosen based on their ability to obtain five A*-C grades at GCSE but who are unlikely to succeed without support.

Age 14–15: in-school mentoring by university student, parents' information evening and three day university experience followed by an open day.

Age 15–16: taster day and support with GCSE revision.

Age 16–17: place at HE4me Scheme to anyone who has successfully taken part and would like to find out more about how to apply to higher education. There is a compact scheme available to suitable candidates who would like to study at a local college or university.

Around 98 per cent of participants had no parental experience of higher education. Overall, 79 per cent of 'Making Progress' participants achieved five A*-Cs at GCSE in comparison with 36 per cent in their home schools and 86 per cent remained in education after age 16.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Reading

BOX 7

Example of short-term impact monitoring

Data from Aimhigher South Yorkshire for their 2006–07 roadshows for pupils aged 12–13, which cost approximately £40,000 per year, highlights the impact that outreach activities can have on pupils' perceptions of higher and further education. The roadshows visited 12 schools across South Yorkshire with 1,758 pupils participating. Participants are asked "how do you feel about further and higher education?" at the start and the end of the session. The following data illustrates the feedback from one roadshow:

	Excited	Confident	Not Interested	Worried
Before	13	35	14	5
After	58	7	2	0

Source: Aimhigher South Yorkshire Annual Monitoring Report 1 August 2006–31 July 2007

2.29 There is some evidence that Aimhigher activities have led to stronger attainment at GCSE. A longitudinal analysis²¹ tracking young people found a small association between interventions and pupil attainment after controlling for background characteristics at school and pupil level, and there are examples of specific activities which have proved effective (**Box 8**). Our case study respondents told us that they had difficulty in keeping in contact with young people who had taken part in widening participation activities, therefore it was not possible to determine whether they made the transition to higher education. The Department and the Funding Council have recently commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to track learner data from the national pupil database to the Higher Education Statistics Agency record to ascertain the degree of participation by cohorts in the early 'Excellence Challenge' phase of the programme.

2.30 It is difficult to judge whether Aimhigher has been cost-effective because of limited information on impact and cost. Research commissioned by the Department found significant variation in delivery costs between partnerships for what appeared to be similar activities, although this may be explained by differences in the way the activities were costed.²² The report recommended that Aimhigher partnerships receive consistent guidance about how funding should be used. Aimhigher representatives we met during our case studies suggested the programme could be improved through longer-term funding (to address what is a long-term need) and through more joint working between Aimhigher partnerships.

National guidance on evaluation

2.31 The Funding Council's 2006 survey of universities and colleges found that more than 80 per cent collect student information such as post-code, gender and ethnicity. Less than one half, however, collect the occupation of the family's chief wage earner from which socio-economic background could be derived. Data collection needs to be improved if widening participation activities are to be better targeted at people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

2.32 To support the development of better evaluation, the Funding Council has commissioned a series of capacity-building workshops and developed a new practitioner guide²³ with a set of criteria against which widening participation initiatives can be tested (**Box 9**).²⁴ From 2008-11, the Funding Council will require all Aimhigher partnerships to submit an evaluation plan and report on evaluation at the end of each year.

BOX 8

Example of increased attainment at Maths GCSE – an Aimhigher award winner

In the South East, the Aimhigher Berkshire Partnership with funding support from the Regional Office developed and delivered a number of maths residential weekends, with a local target school for which they were then awarded a national Aimhigher award. In 2004, before the activities began, 22 per cent of pupils in the target school were achieving 5 A*-C grades at maths GCSE. In 2006, following an event at the University of Reading, 44 per cent went on to gain maths GCSE at grade C or above and this rose to 51 per cent in 2007. Following the success of the scheme, it has now been rolled out to another seven target schools across Berkshire.

Source: National Aimhigher awards scheme 2007. Winner of category 1: Aimhigher school/college award.

BOX 9

The Funding Council's evaluation criteria for widening participation activities

Level	Aim of the widening participation activity	Examples of evidence
1	Participants' awareness, confidence building, aspiration, knowledge of higher education	Feedback questionnaires, focus groups
2	The extent of change in capacities as well as confidence	GCSE scores, staying on rates, progression to higher education in areas/schools Reported levels of student confidence and motivation
3	Institutional/sectoral impact including changes in school/higher education engagement, teacher and parent opinions of effect of interventions	Questionnaires, focus groups, interviews
4	National and/or long term objectives	Tracking schemes by institutions and Aimhigher

Source: Saunders et al. (2007), Widening Participation capacity building and evaluation

The evaluations will feed into an end of year assessment of the impact of Aimhigher.²⁵ The Funding Council commissioned new research in March 2008 to investigate the contribution of Aimhigher and other programmes to the participation of under-represented groups in higher education.

Targeting outreach activities

2.33 We found widespread concern that many pupils who take part in activities run by higher education institutions, such as taster days, intend to apply to higher education anyway as teaching staff rely on pupils volunteering or select those that are enthusiastic. Practitioners conducting outreach activities continue to work with teachers to explain the aims of the programmes. In 2007 the Funding Council in conjunction with the Department issued guidance to institutions on the criteria it believes should be used in targeting widening participation activities to make most effective use of the funding.²⁶ These criteria define target groups for both Aimhigher and institution widening participation activities as learners from:

- socio-economic groups 4-8; and
- disadvantaged backgrounds in areas of relative deprivation where participation in higher education is low.

2.34 The Funding Council's guidance suggests a three stage process for targeting learners:

- Stage 1 – area level targeting (schools, colleges, communities)
- Stage 2 – learner level targeting
- Stage 3 – monitoring the effectiveness of targeting.

The Funding Council will assess the impact of the new guidance on targeting using the Aimhigher partnerships' 2008 monitoring returns.

2.35 To target effectively, institutions require data on relative deprivation, participation rates and socio-economic background at school and pupil level for their catchment area. The Funding Council makes some data available to partnerships (participation rates of local areas data and applicant statistics from UCAS) but institutions or Aimhigher partnerships have to negotiate access to other data sources individually with the bodies that hold the data, for example Local Authorities. In practice, we found institutions and programmes such as Aimhigher use a range of datasets. For example, the Kent and Medway Aimhigher partnership uses a range of criteria and relies on a good dialogue between the partnership and schools and colleges (**Box 10**). The University of Lancaster uses software to map and analyse student applications (**Box 11**).

BOX 10

Targeting criteria for schools by Kent and Medway Aimhigher

When working with schools the Aimhigher Kent and Medway partnership uses:

- Attainment (the percentage of learners with 5 A*-C grades at GCSE);
- Free school meals (percentage of learners in receipt);
- Low participation neighbourhoods (percentage of learners with postcodes in areas with low participation in higher education);
- Levels of disadvantage as measure by the Index of Multiple Deprivation of 2004 (percentage of learners from Lower Super Output Areas or wards with high deprivation); and
- Progression at Key Stage 4 (percentage of learners who progress to Year 12/further education).

When working with post-16 providers, the partnership uses data as follows:

- Levels of disadvantage as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation of 2004 (percentage of learners from Lower Super Output Areas or wards with high deprivation);
- Education Maintenance Allowance (percentage learners in receipt);
- Low levels of learner interest in higher education; and
- Rates of learner progression to higher education from specific level 3 (i.e. A level equivalent) courses.

Source: National Audit Office review of University of Greenwich targeting guidance

BOX 11

'Pro-Clarity' – the University of Lancaster's software for analysing its progress in recruitment

Pro-Clarity is a management information system which enables the University of Lancaster to make better strategic decisions about recruitment and targeting. The system allows multiple sets and types of data to be combined and modelled, for example, student applications and registrations, market intelligence and other relevant information sources. It creates maps showing where applicants come from and where other types of schools and students likely to be interested in Lancaster are located regionally and nationally, allowing it to target its activities.

Source: National Audit Office: University of Lancaster

ii) Lifelong Learning Networks

2.36 Research suggests that learners on vocational programmes are less likely to progress to higher education than those on an academic route. The Youth Cohort Study²⁷ found that 51 per cent of those taking vocational level 3 qualifications go to higher education before the age of 20 compared with 84 per cent of those taking A levels. A combination of fewer courses appropriate for those with vocational qualifications, and vocational learners having, on average, significantly fewer GCSE passes than those taking level 3 academic qualifications such as A levels, underlie the variation.²⁸

2.37 The Funding Council established a programme of Lifelong Learning Networks in 2004, with funding of £104 million now allocated to 30 networks across England, each with funding for a three year period between January 2005 and August 2011. Lifelong Learning Networks are area, regional and national collaborations of universities and colleges which create opportunities for vocational learners. They aim to enhance the coherence, clarity and certainty of vocational progression into and through higher education, taking into account local economic context and regional skill priorities, through:

- developing advice and personalised support for vocational learners;
- aligning and developing curriculum to facilitate progression; and
- establishing progression agreements, including agreements on credit transfer.

2.38 Many Networks are in the process of developing or have launched progression agreements which clarify entry requirements into higher education by agreeing between partners how vocational learners can progress from specific programmes or institutions to other programmes. This work includes mapping progression opportunities for the five new 14-19 Diplomas beginning in 2008. Networks are also developing credit frameworks which enable the recognition and transfer of learning within higher education, for example, the Kent and Medway Credit Framework (**Box 12**). Learners can assemble units of learning, enter and leave higher education at structured points and build up credit at their own pace. Flexible study arrangements can be more appealing to some learners than committing upfront to three years of study, particularly those with other obligations which may otherwise prevent them from considering higher education.

BOX 12

Kent and Medway Credit Framework

The **Kent and Medway Credit Framework** aims to bring together and formalise the different credit regimes across four universities and seven further education colleges. All 11 institutions within the Lifelong Learning Network will accept each others' credits and the other institutions' quality assurance processes. This will enable a learner to use previous study towards entry requirements or a qualification.

The institutions in the Network are working together to ensure that through awarding and recognising credit, they can:

- Encourage learning by recognising achievement gained for small bites of learning, and for single units;
- Enable learners to build up credits towards a qualification;
- Support progression into and through higher education programmes of study and qualifications offered by Kent and Medway providers; and
- Support the development of flexible, work-based learning opportunities to meet the needs of individuals and employers.

Source: Kent and Medway Credit Framework Partnership Agreement developed for the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network 2007-08

2.39 At present there is not a national credit framework in England, unlike in Scotland and Wales. However, in response to the Burgess review²⁹, the Department is working with universities and colleges to develop proposals for national arrangements for credit in higher education and for a common further/higher education approach to credit. A Credit Issues Development Group is currently facilitating a programme that will lead to institutions voluntarily assessing and publishing the credit value of their programmes. Further and higher education institutions are also working together to develop a common approach to credit that can operate across both sectors.

Evaluating the impact of Lifelong Learning Networks

2.40 Networks are expected to set clear targets for the number of students accessing the range of programmes and progressing to higher education. The Funding Council proposes to evaluate success in terms of improvements to the pattern of progression of vocational learners and expects activity to be embedded and sustained after the funding period ends.³⁰ The Funding Council will then consider the long-term sustainability as part of a full evaluation of Lifelong Learning Networks in or shortly after 2009-10.

2.41 Assessing the cost-effectiveness of the activities at this early stage is difficult because of a lack of consistently recorded comparative data. The Funding Council commissioned an interim evaluation which found that Networks are making progress but that it is too soon to conclude whether the objectives will be met, partly a reflection that some are recently established.³¹ The interim review made a number of recommendations relating to the monitoring and evaluation of Lifelong Learning Network activities. It also recommended that the Funding Council provide additional guidance to the Networks on capturing data, financial reporting and monitoring.

iii) Local provision of higher education

2.42 Student mobility has decreased over recent years with more students choosing to study locally and/or live at home. The proportion of full-time, first degree students living in institutionally managed accommodation fell from 35 per cent to 27 per cent between 1995-96 and 2004-05, while the proportion living with their parents increased from 12 per cent to 20 per cent.³² The distance to a suitable higher education institution is a factor for many potential applicants, particularly for those from under-represented groups. Research has found that many first generation entrants are unwilling or unable to move away from home to study in higher education and prefer local provision.³³ Learners can be constrained by where the nearest institution is located, how easy it is to travel there and whether that provision matches their qualification, subject and study preferences. Our survey of unsuccessful applicants included some respondents for whom study in their home town was their only option:

“I was not accepted at the university which is close to where I live. I wanted to study from home as my wife is disabled and I look after her.”

2.43 A recent assessment of the location of higher education provision against population found that the distribution of higher education opportunities is not uniform across England.³⁴ Some urban areas lack sufficient opportunities, while some relatively small towns and cities appear to be over-supplied (**Figure 11**). The Funding Council has started to look at the demand for, and the effect of, local higher education provision, exploring ways to define and determine low provision.³⁵

2.44 At present, institutions apply to the Funding Council for funding to develop provision in new locations. The Funding Council's regional teams, in conjunction with regional agencies and institutions, make assessments of the need for additional centres for provision based on local need, employer demand and what is being met by neighbouring institutions. Between 2003 and 2007,

the Funding Council allocated a total of £130 million to 32 capital projects across eight regions of England, with projects additionally leveraging funding from other sources.³⁶ When fully operational, they are expected to provide places for an additional 9,000 students. We found several examples of initiatives to provide higher education in areas lacking provision (**Box 13**). The Funding Council has not yet fully evaluated the impact of this additional provision.

2.45 The Department has announced a new policy, ‘the new university challenge’, which aims to provide higher education in areas of under-provision.³⁷ The Department and the Funding Council have recently announced a consultation for developing a bidding mechanism for funding new higher education centres or university campuses, including criteria for assessing funding proposals. The Funding Council will draw upon its Strategic Development Fund for the expansion of local and regional provision over the next 6 years, creating up to 10,000 new student places.

BOX 13

Working with other institutions to provide higher education in areas lacking provision

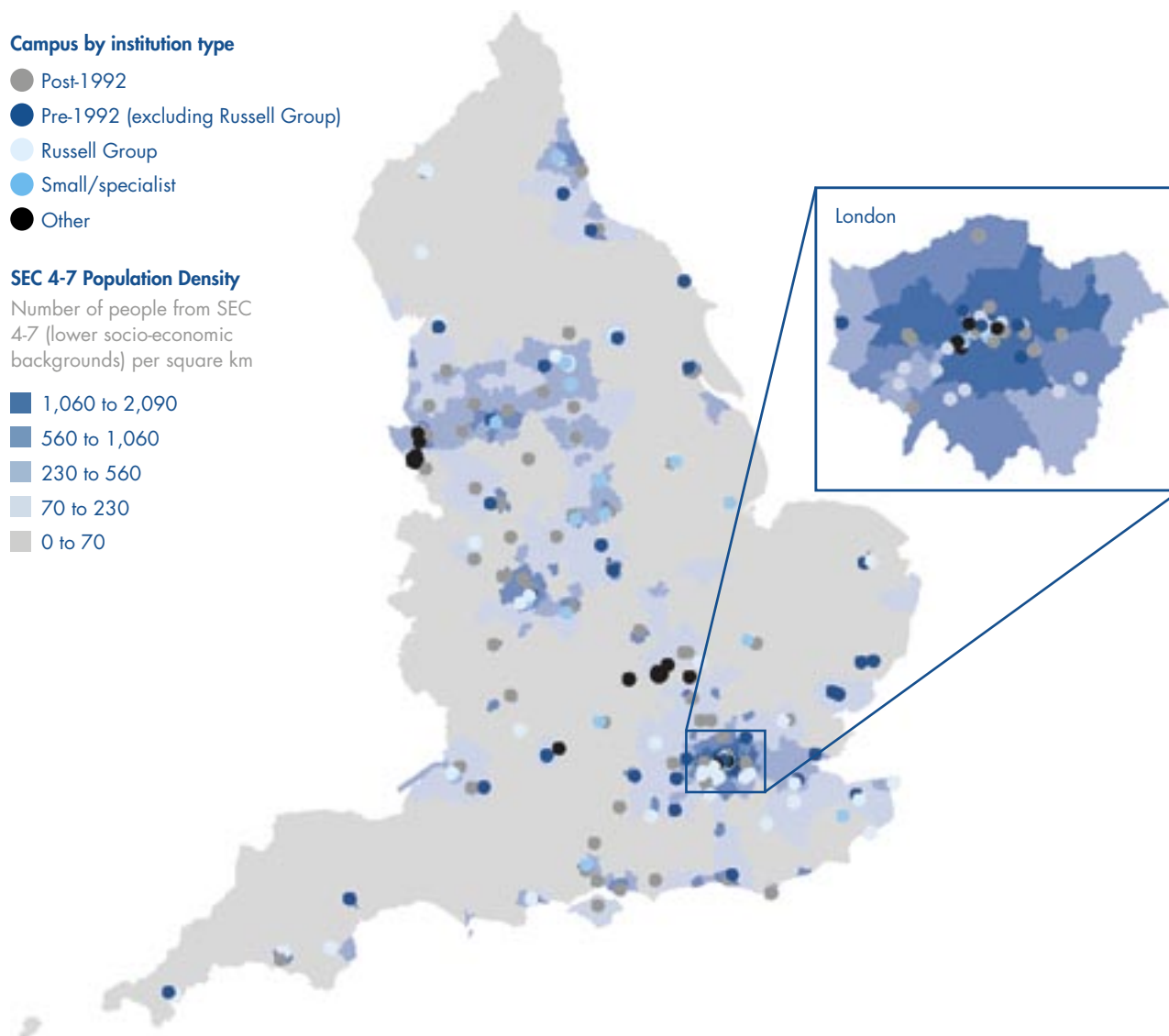
The **University Centre Folkestone** is a joint venture with Canterbury Christ Church and the University of Greenwich to develop higher education provision in the Folkestone and South Kent area. With funding from the Haan Charitable Trust, the South East of England Development Agency and the Funding Council, it aims “to bring higher education to the region and support lifelong learning, while working with employers to identify training needs...”. The Centre offers honours degrees, foundation degrees and short courses, and is a community venue.

The **Universities at Medway** has three universities on a single site, in an area which previously had little higher education provision and low rates of participation in higher education. The University of Greenwich, Canterbury Christ Church University and the University of Kent provide a range of higher education courses whilst sharing common facilities such as a library and cafeteria.

The **University of Worcester** works with schools and further education colleges across Herefordshire, South Staffordshire, Gloucestershire and Shropshire via its Lifelong Learning Network and Aimhigher partnerships. This wide geographical spread recognises the low level of higher education provision in these rural areas.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Greenwich and University of Worcester

11 Locations of higher education institutions in relation to the distribution of the English population from lower socio-economic backgrounds



Source: National Audit Office analysis of population data from the 2001 Census (Key Statistics Table 14A) and higher education institution postcode data from Higher Education Statistics Agency Campus Record 2006-07



What higher education institutions are doing to widen participation

3.1 This part of the report examines how institutions have influenced participation. It considers:

- the admissions process;
- types of qualification, modes of delivery and entry support;
- student financial support from institutions;
- working with schools and colleges; and
- senior management support for widening participation.

The admissions process

3.2 Higher education institutions determine their own admissions policies and criteria for assessing applicants. In 2004 the Schwartz review³⁸ identified five main principles for fair admissions and made a number of recommendations for good practice that underpin the assessment of applicants to higher education. The review concluded that

“a fair admissions system should seek to minimise barriers for applicants. These could include barriers arising from the means of assessment, the type of qualifications an applicant holds (vocational or academic), and disability.”

The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme³⁹ was commissioned by the Department in 2008 to undertake research into the implementation of the recommendations of the Schwartz review. In April 2008, as part of the widening participation agenda, the Department encouraged all higher education institutions to publish their admissions policies and requested that the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access plan to look at how each institution could adopt open and accountable admissions systems.

3.3 From our survey of applicants who were unplaced following the 2006 UCAS application cycle, we found that these unplaced applicants received varying levels of assistance with completing their application form. In particular:

- Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds received significantly less adequate information, advice and guidance from friends and family than those from upper socio-economic backgrounds, and were more likely not to have received any at all.
- Applicants greatly appreciated dedicated support on the application process, for example advice and guidance directly from tutors on completing applications. Strongly positive comments tended to come from those that received one-to-one support.
- Older applicants, who were not in school or college, found the application process and accessing the necessary advice more difficult.

3.4 Institutions have moved the deadline for UCAS applications by a month to mid-January, to give those writing references for applicants more time to assess the individual's abilities. This is particularly relevant for applicants studying at further education and sixth form colleges where teaching staff may only have known pupils for a relatively short time, and therefore is likely to generally benefit applicants from under-represented groups. Another development in 2008 was the re-launch of the UCAS 'Extra' service for applicants who do not receive any offers from their initial UCAS application, providing applicants with another chance in February-March to apply to higher education in the same year.

Institution entry qualifications

3.5 Vocational entry qualifications pose both challenges and opportunities. Some institutions have a long history of accepting entry qualifications other than A levels but say that there are challenges in keeping up with what is offered in terms of content and appropriateness. The institutions that we visited were generally supportive of the new 14–19 Diplomas, but would be looking carefully at the content of courses to seek assurance that they adequately prepare students for higher education.

3.6 We found that institutions present entry requirements differently, for example in their prospectuses and websites, the latter increasingly becoming the main source of up-to-date information about entry to higher education. Some list only A level grades, others the UCAS tariff points, and there is considerable variation in the coverage of vocational qualifications. Around 70 per cent of courses now have 'Entry Profiles' on the UCAS website, which include qualification entry requirements. A survey of applicants by the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme in 2007 found that 84 per cent of respondents looked for an Entry Profile, and Entry Profiles on the UCAS website received around two million hits in March 2008. It is too early to say if Entry Profiles will help to widen participation.

3.7 The Unistats website, launched in November 2007 and run by UCAS on behalf of the Funding Council, compares undergraduate subjects at higher education institutions in the UK by entry requirements, graduate employment rates and student satisfaction rates, and is a useful resource for potential applicants and those that advise them. It has a target to double the usage of its predecessor site (Teaching Quality Information), which was under-used. The number of visits to the Unistats website between January and March 2008 was unchanged from the number of visits to the Teaching Quality Information site between January and March 2006.

Interviews and admissions tests

3.8 Interviews and admissions tests are used by some institutions for entry to certain subjects and courses. They can be used as part of the admissions decision-making process not only on knowledge and ability, but also on aptitude and potential, particularly in high demand subjects, for example healthcare-related subjects. A 2007 review by the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme found that there were 45 institutions (out of 311 in UCAS' 2008 entry scheme) using one or more admissions test, and that 57 different tests were being used, but that tests were used in assessing applications to less than one half of one per cent of all courses. Ongoing research into the use of one generic admissions test has

found that after taking into account GCSE and A level performance, scores are generally related to a number of background and socio-economic factors including gender and ethnicity.⁴⁰ Applicants from certain educational/income backgrounds are more likely to have been coached in interview and admissions test techniques, whereas such tests could be a daunting experience for applicants with little or no experience of them.

3.9 We found examples of institutions identifying and flagging applications from widening participation students. This practice ensures that the admissions tutors are aware of how widening participation applications should be treated. However, this centralised oversight is not standard. The University of Sheffield uses this approach (**Box 14 overleaf**), but at present it only covers a quarter of applications to the institution, though it is intended to roll it out to other departments.

Higher education compact schemes

3.10 Compact schemes give special consideration to the circumstances of students who come from schools or colleges with which a higher education institution has an arrangement. They are of particular relevance to students whose circumstances may make them less likely to progress to higher education. Schemes vary in their approach: some give lower entry qualification offers than is typical, some guarantee places on meeting certain pre-entry criteria, and some give extra UCAS points, although such decisions are dependent on additional evidence of an applicant's potential for successful study. Some compact schemes are bilateral agreements specific to a school or college, others encompass a wide range of schools and colleges. The Department and the Funding Council are reviewing the coverage, number and range of compact schemes. They plan to examine the mechanisms adopted within different schemes and where possible will assess the impact upon both learners and institutions. We found a number of compact schemes during our case study visits (**Box 15 overleaf**).

Types of qualification, modes of delivery and entry support

3.11 Three year, full-time honours degrees are the most common higher education experience. Some institutions, however, are making use of new practices in learning and teaching to diversify the way higher education is delivered and improve quality. During our fieldwork we saw examples of institutions rethinking the marketing of their courses to ensure they are inclusive and meaningful to applicants from under-represented groups, and some institutions have broadened their student profile by adding

new courses to their prospectus. For example, the Royal Veterinary College now includes some of its courses under the banner 'Biological Sciences' rather than 'Veterinary Science' so that they appear less exclusive, and has introduced Bioveterinary Sciences and a foundation degree in Veterinary Nursing. Some institutions see flexible and part-time courses as addressing a need from under-represented learners, for example those with care responsibilities, and as a result, the number of people able to choose part-time study has increased. For example, a new programme offers a flexible route for learners to study chemistry or physics through two years part-time at the Open University followed by two years full-time at one of six institutions around the UK, including Lancaster, Reading and Sheffield Universities.

Foundation degrees

3.12 Foundation degrees began in 2001 as an intermediate, work-related higher education qualification. They are designed in conjunction with employers and are commonly delivered by further education colleges in partnership with higher education institutions. Foundation degrees are designed as an end qualification in their own right but can count towards a full honours degree with a further 12–15 months of full-time study.

3.13 In 2007-08 there were approximately 72,000 students enrolled on foundation degrees.⁴¹ The target is to have 100,000 learners enrolled by 2010. Although not designed explicitly to widen participation, foundation degrees attract people from a broader range of backgrounds and provide an alternative route for those without A levels. Of students undertaking foundation degrees:

- the majority were over 21 on entry;
- approximately half had qualifications other than A levels, compared with a third of the general undergraduate population;⁴²
- both white entrants and black Caribbean entrants represented a bigger proportion of foundation degree entrants than they did for undergraduate provision. All other ethnic groups represented a corresponding lower proportion;
- 54 per cent of students undertaking foundation degrees in 2003-04 went on to undertake full-time honours degrees; and
- people from low participation neighbourhoods were better represented.

BOX 14

Reviewing applications for dentistry at the University of Sheffield

Applications that are received from participants of the ADOPT Scheme (Access to Dental Occupations: Practice and Tutoring) or through the Compact Scheme are identified and go through a separate process. Tutors look at GCSEs and expect to see a good range of A and B grades. Even if the applicant is not predicted AAB grades at A level, the standard offer for dentistry, they are not rejected immediately and the tutor reviews the references and personal statements. They look for evidence of potential to succeed on the degree programme, student motivation and commitment, work experience, and research into dentistry. If the applicant meets all the criteria then he/she will be invited for an interview. The final offer made will still be AAB as the institution does not want to lower standards, and it gives the applicant a target to aim for.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Sheffield

BOX 15

Examples of Compact schemes

The **University of Greenwich** works with post-16 learners in eight sixth-forms and two colleges in the London boroughs of Bexley, Lewisham and Greenwich to address low progression rates of learners, particularly those on vocational courses. Through the partnership, the institution offers sustained support to learners who have the ability to progress onto higher education but are either unlikely to do so or would struggle without additional support. More specifically, the scheme targets learners with no parental experience of higher education. Support includes workshops, presentations, events, online information and sustained support from student ambassadors. During the programme, which was funded by the Learning and Skills Council and the European Social Fund, 139 of 259 individuals progressed to higher education.

The **University of Sheffield** has a strong relationship with a large number of schools and colleges within the region and through these links, aims to raise awareness of the higher education opportunities that are available to students. The Compact Scheme operated by the University aims to encourage all students who have the ability, including those who might not ordinarily do so, to consider higher education as an option. The scheme offers generic support to schools and colleges throughout the applications process, as well as offering individual support to applicants whose schools/colleges identify them as deserving special consideration, if they are interested in applying for a course at the University.

Sheffield Hallam University has longstanding Associate School and College Partnerships with over one hundred local schools and colleges. All are within reasonable travelling distance of the University. Partnership bursaries are available to students who progress to Sheffield Hallam University. It has evidence of increased interest from partners in respect of both activities/projects and student applications since the partnerships commenced.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Greenwich, University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University

3.14 Take up of foundation degrees has increased whilst take up of the similar Higher National Diplomas has declined (**Figure 12**), suggesting that overall foundation degrees have changed the choice of qualification, although taken together the number taking both types of qualification has increased. Foundation degrees cover subject areas that were not previously available at Higher National Diploma or equivalent level.

Access courses

3.15 Delivered mostly by further education colleges and targeted, in particular, at groups which are under-represented in higher education, Access courses are specially designed to provide preparation for higher education for mature students who have few, if any, other qualifications (**Box 16**).

3.16 The Funding Council estimates that around 25 per cent of first-time, mature entrants to full-time degree programmes enter via an Access course. Around 40 per cent of those who joined Access courses in 1998-99 went on to undertake higher education studies and around two-thirds of these successfully graduated. This compares favourably with students who entered higher education with non-A level qualifications, around 60 per cent of whom graduated, but somewhat lower than students with A levels, around 75 per cent of whom graduated.⁴³

Participation in high-demand subjects

3.17 Targeting potential applicants from low participation groups can be a useful tactic for institutions to recruit to low-demand courses, but there are examples of institutions making efforts to widen participation in high-demand subjects. High-demand courses usually require higher attainment in entry qualifications, which makes it difficult for pupils in schools where academic achievement is relatively low to gain access to the courses and subsequent professions. Some institutions we visited had introduced alternative pathways to professional courses (**Box 17 overleaf**).

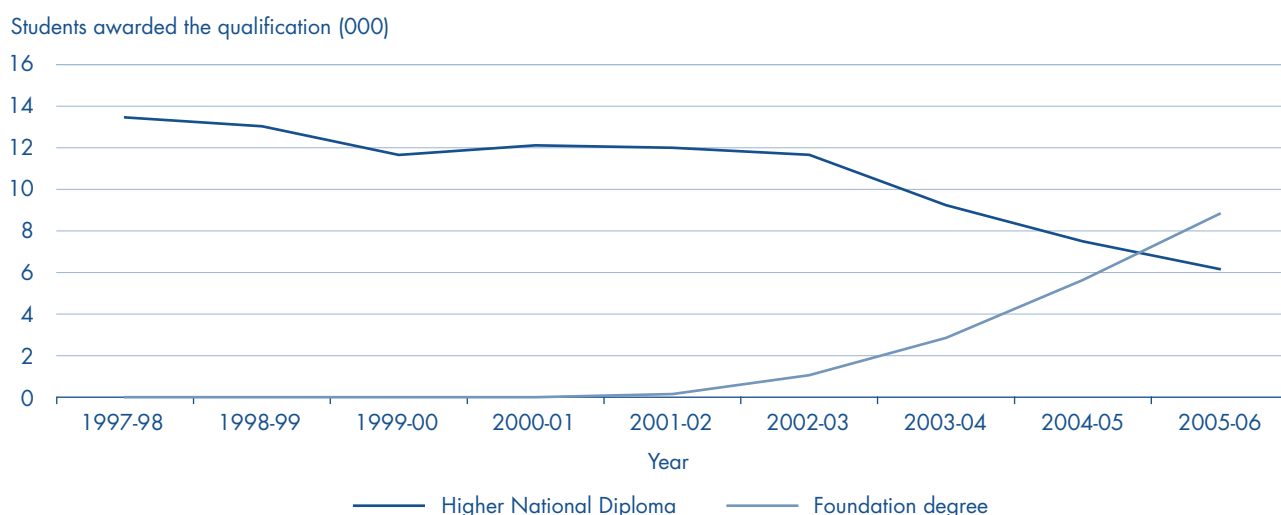
BOX 16

An example of Access course provision

Open College of the North West is a partnership scheme between six universities (which supply educational expertise and academic validation) and approximately 50 further education, adult education and sixth-form colleges. Of these five universities and 26 provider organisations are actively involved in Access to Higher Education. Seven Access pathways covering a range of subject areas provide progression to higher levels of study and training. Individuals with no previous formal qualifications can register for the course and where successful can gain an Access to Higher Education Diploma and admission to undergraduate programmes.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Lancaster

12 Number of students awarded Higher National Diplomas have fallen while those awarded foundation degrees have risen in English higher education institutions 1998-99 to 2005-06



Source: Response to question in House of Commons asked on 20 February 2007:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070220/text/70220w0025.htm>

Student financial support from institutions

3.18 From September 2006 institutions have been able to charge new, full-time students tuition fees up to a maximum value of £3,000 in 2006-07 and £3,070 in 2007-08, subject to an agreement approved by the Office for Fair Access. Most institutions are charging the full fees, although a small number charge less than the maximum and some charge different fees for different courses. Institutions charging tuition fees of more than £2,765, the value of the full maintenance grant in 2007-08, must offer additional financial help in the form of bursaries. Students eligible to receive a full maintenance grant must be offered a bursary or other help that will at least make up the difference between the full maintenance grant and the tuition fee rate.

3.19 Institutions are required to determine what proportion of their additional tuition fee income they plan to spend on bursaries to support students from low-income families. In the first year of the new tuition fee income regime (2006-07), institutions spent a total of £96 million (21 per cent) of the total additional fee income on bursaries, although the proportion varied considerably by institution; out of 120 institutions which offered bursaries, 18 allocated over 30 per cent to bursaries, and 32 allocated less than 15 per cent (**Figure 13**). Additionally, 103 institutions chose to use part of their tuition fee income to support additional outreach activities in schools or communities, at an average cost of £200,000 per institution, amounting to £21 million in total. There was no requirement for institutions to use tuition fee income to fund outreach activities and the Office for Fair Access regards this as an indication of institutions' commitment to widening participation.

3.20 The value of bursaries for students receiving full maintenance grants in 2008-09 varies across institutions, from the statutory minimum of £310 to a maximum of £3,150 (Appendix 2, Figure 17). They are generally allocated on the basis of family income. Some institutions have chosen to pay a flat rate to all students regardless of means, while others have also used some of their tuition fee income to pay bursaries or scholarships according to academic merit. In general, post-1992 institutions which tend to have more students from low income families who are eligible, pay smaller bursaries to individual students than either Russell Group or other pre-1992 institutions. On average, the lower the performance of an institution in relation to its benchmark for participation of young

BOX 17

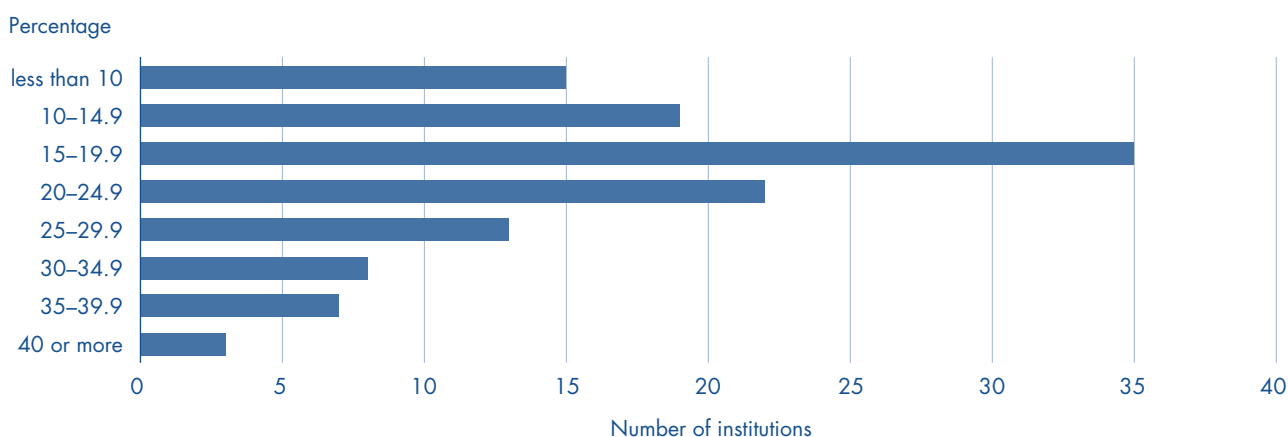
A scheme to provide an alternative pathway into veterinary medicine

The **Royal Veterinary College** developed the Veterinary Gateway Course in 2005 as a one year preparatory course, also known as a foundation year. It is an initiative by the Royal Veterinary College, supported by the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool and the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Bristol. To join the programme, students must be eligible for full maintenance grant, with no parental experience of higher education and must attend a non-selective state school. The tutors look for evidence of potential, with B grades in maths, English and science at GCSE and predicted C grades or above at A level. They also have to demonstrate some experience and interest in working with animals. Following a successful interview, they start a foundation year with smaller class sizes and a different learning environment from the Bachelor's course. On completion, they progress to the first year of the Bachelor's course.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: Royal Veterinary College

13 Percentage of tuition fee income distributed as bursaries

Institutions allocate varying proportions of their additional income from tuition fees to support students



Source: National Audit Office analysis of 2006-07 Office for Fair Access data

students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the greater its bursary (**Figure 14**). This reflects the higher proportion of post-1992 institutions that perform better than their benchmarks, but may also suggest that some institutions are using higher bursaries to attract students from lower income backgrounds. There is, however, no evidence at present that the range of bursaries on offer has influenced students' choice of institution.^{44, 45}

Take-up of bursaries

3.21 In the first year of bursaries, the majority (64 per cent) of institutions distributed less than they anticipated on bursaries. In total, £96 million was distributed as bursaries compared with an estimated £115 million. The Office for Fair Access believes that this is principally because institutions over-estimated the numbers of students that would be eligible to take-up bursaries, and as many as 12,000 students entering higher education in 2006 on full state support failed to collect a bursary⁴⁶ despite meeting the necessary criteria.

3.22 The Student Loans Company found that around one-third of students entering higher education in 2007 did not give their consent to share family income information, included in the application for statutory

student support, with the institution to which they applied. This would have enabled automatic identification and payment to applicants from low income families.⁴⁷ The Student Loans Company surveyed those students in receipt of the full maintenance grant who did not give their consent and found 75 per cent said the reason was lack of understanding or awareness of bursaries. The Student Loans Company is improving the loan application form with clearer language around the implications of not giving consent to share data, which will change from an opt-in to an opt-out from 2008-09.

Working with schools and colleges

3.23 The Department is promoting strengthened links between higher education, schools and colleges to raise attainment and aspirations towards higher education. From our survey of teachers we found that many teachers appreciate institutions' work, but a large number also think that it could be improved. Some 40 per cent of teachers thought that insufficient support was given by universities and further education colleges to identify and support students for entry to higher education. Closer links between schools and higher education institutions was the second most common suggestion for increasing the chances of students entering higher education.

3.24 In its 14–19 Education Skills White Paper (2005) the Department for Education and Skills announced a post-16 progression measure as a way of recognising schools for supporting their students to make good post-16 choices. Progression information will be published in the School Profile from summer 2009. The National Council for Educational Excellence is looking at ways to develop greater levels of engagement between higher education and schools and colleges and how to encourage more applications to higher education from secondary schools in disadvantaged areas.⁴⁸ The Funding Council suggests prioritising partnerships with schools located in areas with low participation. These initiatives aim to increase participation but it is too early to say if they increase the progression into higher education and what impact they have on the participation of under-represented groups in higher education.

14 Average value of bursaries in 2008 for institutions performing above, at and below benchmark for participation by social class in 2006-07

On average, better performing institutions offer smaller bursaries, but individual variation is much greater.

Institution performance in 2006-07	Average bursary (£)	Number of institutions
Below benchmark	1322	20
At benchmark	770	63
Above benchmark	657	25

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Office for Fair Access data

NOTE

Excludes institutions for which bursary value or performance information are not available.

Higher education provision by colleges

3.25 More than one third of entrants to higher education have attended a further education college, and colleges teach one in eight of the undergraduate population.⁴⁹

As providers, they either develop their own directly funded higher education courses and deliver higher level qualifications (for example Higher National Diplomas or Certificates) or develop and deliver courses franchised from and validated by a higher education institution. In 2007-08:

- the Funding Council is directly funding higher education courses at 143 further education colleges;
- around 260 further education colleges are being funded indirectly through partnerships with one or more university or through funding consortia; and
- the Learning and Skills Council is also funding higher education courses at further education colleges, for example National Vocational Qualifications and professional body qualifications.⁵⁰

3.26 The Department found that further education is particularly effective in providing higher education for learners from disadvantaged groups, backgrounds and communities.⁵¹ Many further education colleges offer flexible, local opportunities which make higher education accessible to people who might otherwise face significant barriers to participation. University staff we interviewed regarded higher education delivered by further education colleges as essential to widening participation and we found examples of successful partnerships (**Box 18**).

Senior management support for widening participation

3.27 We found strong senior management support for widening participation at the institutions we visited, with responsibility usually vested in a pro-Vice Chancellor supported by specialist staff. The majority of institutions recognised widening participation objectives explicitly in their mission statements or high-level strategies.⁵² Some institutions regard widening participation as inherent to the culture of the organisation and recognise it in the appraisal of staff performance. The Funding Council recognises the need to reinforce and nurture this commitment and sees it as essential to widening participation.⁵³

3.28 The institutions we visited believe they spend more on widening participation than the Funding Council grant that is allocated on the basis of widening participation criteria. Generally, some or all of the grant is retained centrally for core activities, but some institutions devolve part of their widening participation budget to faculties for subject-specific projects. Outside of the central activities, institutions do not record how much staff time and other costs are expended on widening participation-related work.

BOX 18

Examples of successful higher/further education working

The **University of Lancaster** validates higher education degrees at the East Lancashire Institute for Higher Education. Blackburn College delivers higher education via the East Lancashire Institute for Higher Education which is an associate college to Lancaster University. They are directly funded by the Funding Council to deliver higher education courses which are accredited by Lancaster University. Students study courses on the Blackburn site, receiving qualifications from Lancaster. The college provides:

- a 'ladder of progression' whereby students can study from age 16 to Masters level within the college if they choose, and adult access course learners can continue to study on site;
- employer input – demand-led development of curriculum involving professional bodies;
- bite-sized provision and credit accumulation allowing for structured exit points; and
- integrated careers advice sessions.

The **University of Worcester** has a long-standing partnership with Pershore College (now part of Warwickshire College). They conduct joint-marking of courses to provide confidence in the quality of provision. The partnership provides flexibility to allow students on Higher National Diplomas to top up to Bachelor of Science.

The **University of Greenwich** undertakes a joint local clearing exercise with its partner colleges. In this way, an applicant's chance of getting into a local higher education institution is maximised.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Lancaster, University of Worcester and University of Greenwich



PART FOUR

Addressing the barriers to widening participation

4.1 This part examines barriers to participation in higher education. It evaluates:

- information, advice and guidance; and
- financial support to students from loans and grants.

Information, advice and guidance

4.2 Information, advice and guidance enable students to make informed decisions about their future. It is important not only at key decision points but as part of broader encouragement and guidance about progression to higher education. How it is communicated is as important as what is communicated.⁵⁴

4.3 Concern over the availability and quality of advice on progression routes into higher education and careers options, both to young people in schools and colleges and to adults considering continuing education, was a recurrent theme from our case studies. People we spoke with perceived careers advice services to be of variable quality, lacking in one-to-one advice and focused on those in danger of disengagement from education. There is a strong perception that advice and guidance can be based on teachers' and lecturers' outdated understanding of the qualification routes into higher education, and fail to recognise the range of vocational options and progression routes now available. Similarly, many teachers and lecturers have perceptions of higher education based on their own experiences, and consequently may not always be supportive of young people's aspirations for higher education. Poor quality advice and guidance may result in people undertaking inappropriate GCSE or A Level or equivalent qualifications for the higher education courses and careers to which they hope to progress.

4.4 In our survey of unplaced UCAS applicants we asked about the adequacy of information, advice and guidance (**Box 19 overleaf**). The survey identified similar findings to the Futuretrack project, a survey of 2006 applicants for full-time, UK higher education courses which investigated the attitudes and values of applicants, including those who were not accepted or chose not to accept a place.⁵⁵ We found that:

- Around half of respondents were dissatisfied with the information, advice and guidance they received from their school or college before applying.
- Respondents who received sufficient information, advice and guidance were more likely to re-apply to higher education the following year. Of these, many say that they have now had more or better advice about the process and what institutions are looking for, are improving their qualifications, or have done more research and changed their plans.

4.5 The Department's review of careers education and guidance for 11 to 19 year olds acknowledged serious weaknesses in the system.⁵⁶ The subsequent 'Youth Matters' Green Paper and 'Youth Matters: Next Steps' put forward ways to improve information, advice and guidance services. Since April 2008 responsibility and funding for commissioning information, advice and guidance services for young people has been the responsibility of Local Authorities. Children's Trusts, schools, colleges and other learning providers are expected to work together and agree new arrangements for delivering services. The services should target all groups that require timely and high quality information, advice and guidance. The Department for Children, Schools and Families published a set of Quality Standards for young people's information, advice and guidance in April 2007, and in October 2007 CEGNET (the website of the Department for Children, Schools and Families careers education support programme) published guidance for practitioners on the application of the new standards.

BOX 19

Comments by unplaced UCAS applicants on information, advice and guidance

We asked respondents for comments on the support, advice and guidance they had received. Recurring themes from over one thousand responses received were:

Schools and Colleges

- Some respondents felt very strongly that they did not have the opportunity to access sufficient advice and guidance.
- Respondents greatly appreciated dedicated support on the application process, for example, dedicated sessions for seeking advice and guidance from tutors on completing applications. Strongly positive comments tended to come from those that received one-to-one support from a particular tutor.
- Young people need help and guidance in deciding what and where to study. Some felt that advice was based too much on the reputation and status of particular institutions, rather than on the relevance of particular courses to particular careers.

- Some needed better advice at an early stage to pursue their chosen careers, for example, advice on which GCSEs to take, or where a language or science was required.
- If choosing an uncommon route, for example, to a specialist college, young people found that specific advice was lacking. Advice was often focused on typical courses and well-known institutions.

Higher education institutions

- As applicants will be contributing to the cost of their higher education there is a growing view that they should be treated better as potential customers.
- Some cited poor advice as a reason for their decision to abandon aspirations to higher education.

Source: Unsuccessful applicant survey conducted by National Audit Office and UCAS

BOX 20

Institutions work to improve information, advice and guidance

The Pre-entry Careers Officer at the **University of Worcester** provides impartial advice to hard-to-reach adults considering higher education as a possible option, for example, parents from 'working-class' backgrounds wishing to return to education. The officer spends time in communities where higher education would not traditionally be considered as an option.

Sheffield and Doncaster Aimhigher Partnership and the local Connexions partnership **Sheffield Futures** manage a project working with teachers, careers advisers and parents (the 'influencers') to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance to young people. It includes training for groups of tutors at schools, colleges and independent training providers, booklets, a four day accredited careers course, sessions on effective use of information technology, motivating learners, higher education finance and understanding progression routes. The project also targets parents, informing them and carers without a higher education background of the benefits of higher education, options and finance. Other activities include training parents as mentors for other parents.

The 'Careers for the Future' programme was a three year project delivered jointly by **Sheffield Futures** (the Sheffield Connexions Service) and **Nord Anglia**. The project targeted young people who were predicted to attain five GCSEs at C/D grade and had the potential to achieve level 3, a group that falls outside the usual remit of the Connexions Service. It provided them with information on learning and career opportunities, through personal advisers attached to schools. The project's aims included:

- To increase participation in post-16 education.
- To increase participation in higher education, particularly for young people from families without a history of higher education.
- To change the choice patterns of young people to better reflect the economic opportunities available in the region.

An independent evaluation found high levels of satisfaction from participants, personal advisers and school careers co-ordinators. The vast majority of young people reported positive impacts in, for example, developing improved and focused career strategies, selecting their next courses of study, completing applications, improving their confidence and communication skills, and improving their understanding of job opportunities. Available destinations data showed that young people supported by the programme were significantly more likely to stay in education or progress to employment compared with those who received no support.

Source: National Audit Office fieldwork: University of Worcester and Sheffield Hallam University

The role of friends and family in information, advice and guidance

4.6 Our survey of unplaced applicants indicated that friends and family remain a significant source of guidance. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds reported receiving significantly less adequate information, advice and guidance from friends and family than those from professional family backgrounds, and were more likely to have received none at all.

4.7 Research has shown that parental attitudes to higher education influence the educational choices of their children.⁵⁷ In our case studies we found examples of relatively affluent areas where participation in higher education is low and many parents had no experience of higher education themselves. We saw examples of institutions working to address this issue through direct engagement with families. Parents especially value information on employability and employment opportunities as it provides assurance on the relevance of higher education and a reason to invest time and money in it.

4.8 Many teachers who responded to our survey regarded family background and support as a factor in preventing students progressing to higher education. Such issues were mentioned more often by teachers surveyed working in areas with a high level of deprivation and a low rate of participation in higher education. Our survey found that a lack of family expectation or tradition of higher education involvement is particularly significant. Among teachers surveyed who work in schools in the 40 per cent most deprived areas, one in four teachers considered it an obstacle, compared with one in seven in the most prosperous 20 per cent of districts. Similarly, teachers were more likely to think it a barrier in areas with the lowest rates of higher education participation (31 per cent compared with 13 per cent of teachers working in areas with the highest rates). Institutions and programmes need to do more work with families and communities to raise aspirations to higher education.

Financial support for students through loans and grants

4.9 The Department introduced a new maintenance grant for students from low income backgrounds in 2006 and there is a range of grants available to students in different circumstances, in addition to bursaries provided directly by institutions. Loans to cover living costs and tuition fees are available from the Student Loans Company. When variable tuition fees were introduced in 2006 the Government also changed the arrangements for repayment of fees. Full-time

students no longer pay up front for these, and repayment of loans for both fees and living costs is deferred until the student leaves higher education and is earning over £15,000 a year. The Department plans to examine the impact of the deferral of payment on widening participation as part of its 2009 review of tuition fees.

The impact of student finance changes on applications

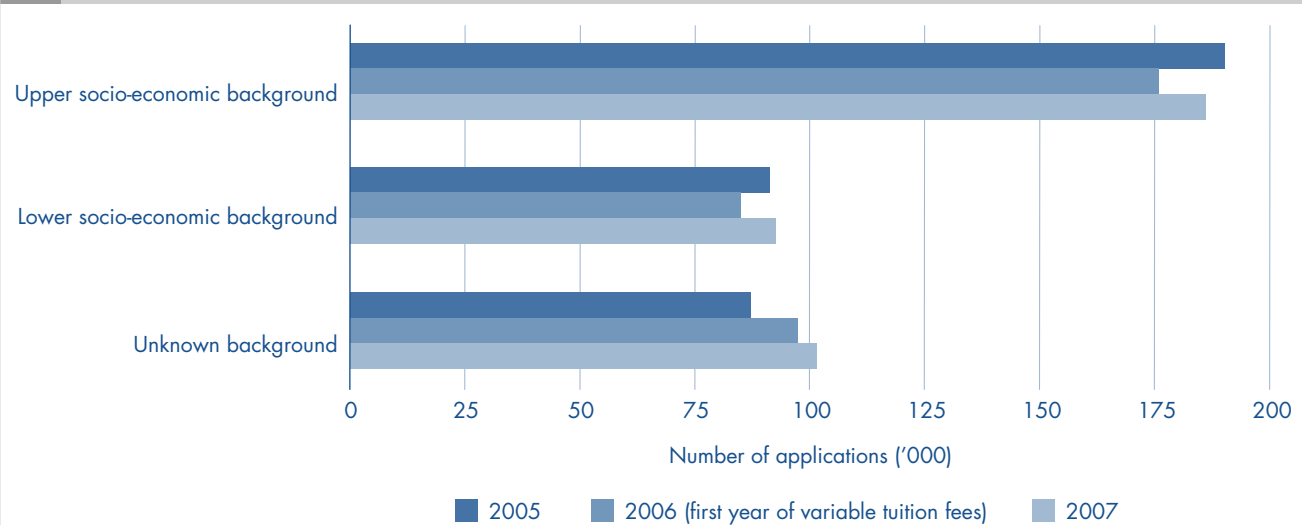
4.10 Many of the institutions we visited did not believe the introduction of variable fees had reduced student applications, and the continued rise in the total number of applications supports this. There was a significant increase in the number of applications in 2005 followed by a dip in 2006 immediately following the introduction of variable fees, but applications have since recovered, most notably from applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds (**Figure 15 overleaf**). The Funding Council's analysis on trends in participation accounting for population trends concurs with this assessment (Figure 4, page 12). However, there is little research on the impact of fees on those who have not applied to higher education, and it is not known whether financial factors have discouraged them from considering applying.

4.11 Our survey of teaching staff in schools and colleges nevertheless found that fear of future debt is the obstacle they think most impedes students' progress into higher education. Increasing financial support or incentives to students is the change that they think would do most to widen participation in higher education. Greater financial assistance and family support were mentioned more often by teaching staff in areas of high deprivation and low participation in higher education. 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.

Student awareness of the financial support available

4.12 During our visits to institutions we found that students' understanding of financial support, budgeting and debt is generally low, reflecting a finding from previous National Audit Office and Committee of Public Accounts reports.⁵⁸ This may be partly because students have to navigate through a range of sources to obtain information on the full range of financial support available. Research has found that students have a low understanding of what bursaries are, whether they may be eligible and where to get information from.⁵⁹ Our survey

15 Numbers of applications have remained similar after the introduction of variable tuition fees



Source: National Audit Office analysis of UCAS data excluding applications made through the Nursing, Midwifery Admissions Service. For 2007 entry, a separate admissions system operated for applications to (some) nursing and midwifery courses, but had been integrated into the UCAS scheme for 2008 entry

of unplaced applicants found that many would appreciate better and more accessible advice on the financial support available. From 2009-10 the Student Loans Company plans to expand the services it offers to students by providing information on the payment of bursaries and other discretionary awards available from institutions.

The costs of pursuing higher education

4.13 The Department estimates that, on average, a graduate earns over a lifetime at least £100,000 more than an individual with accreditation to level 3 (A level or equivalent).⁶⁰ However, there are substantial financial costs of participating in higher education including course fees and lost earnings during the period of study. Graduate debt levels have increased considerably, for example one study found that average debt has increased from £2,212 in 1994 to £13,501 in 2004.⁶¹ Graduate earnings also vary according to gender, ethnicity, age and socio-economic background⁶², with, for example, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds earning on average five per cent less than people from the upper socio-economic backgrounds one year after graduating.⁶³ Research shows that higher education students who are the focus of widening participation policies are more anti-debt than their peers⁶⁴ but there is little research on those who are not in higher education.

Adult involvement in higher education

4.14 Demographic forecasts predict a fall in the number of 18-year-olds between 2010 and 2019 because of fewer births in the 1990s.⁶⁵ The Department estimates that there are about five million adults of working age who have a level 3 qualification but no experience of higher education, representing untapped potential demand.⁶⁶ Many widening participation activities focus on young people at school and there are fewer outreach activities aimed at older learners, although there are some initiatives that would reach this group, for example employer engagement projects and Lifelong Learning Networks. Adults have poorer access to student support for involvement in higher education. Part-time students, who are more likely to be mature, must pay their tuition fees upfront and are often not eligible for bursaries. Similarly learners who choose to return to education to gain qualifications to enter higher education may not be able to top up their existing level 2 or 3 qualifications as funding prioritises those without any existing qualifications.

APPENDIX ONE

- 1 This report is based on:
 - Analyses of a number of datasets;
 - Case studies of selected higher education institutions;
 - Review of academic and other research;
 - Surveys of unsuccessful applicants for higher education places and of teachers in primary and secondary schools;
 - Consultation with stakeholder groups, reference to experts and discussions with staff of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Data analysis

- 2 Our main sources of data were:
 - data submitted to the Higher Education Statistics Agency by publicly funded English higher education institutions, which provides information on all students funded by the Funding Council and others who were enrolled on higher education courses with higher education institutions;
 - the National Pupil Database which holds information on the characteristics and school attainment of pupils in English maintained schools;
 - the Labour Force Survey, which is a quarterly sample survey of households living at private addresses;
 - the widening participation performance indicators published on the Higher Education Statistics Agency's website.
- 3 We also examined summary data from the Office for Fair Access on institutions' projected and actual spend on bursaries and outreach; the national census for population estimates; data on applications and acceptances to higher education courses through UCAS; and the Department's

Study methodology

Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class indicator. The analysis was conducted by the National Audit Office and reviewed by the Funding Council's and the Department's analytical teams.

Evaluative case visits with higher education institutions

4 We visited seven higher education institutions. These were selected because their performance in the widening participation benchmarks was good, and to provide a balance of sizes, types and locations. They were:

- University of Greenwich
- University of Lancaster
- University of Reading
- University of Sheffield
- Sheffield Hallam University
- Royal Veterinary College
- University of Worcester

5 Our case study visits lasted between one and three days. During the visits, we conducted on average 10 interviews and focus groups with a range of individuals including the Vice Chancellor; pro-Vice Chancellor; managers; student representatives; staff with teaching or pastoral responsibilities; admissions, recruitment, widening participation and outreach staff. We also met with representatives from partner colleges and schools, local Aimhigher partnerships and Lifelong Learning Networks.

Literature review

6 We examined published accounts, annual reports, research, policy papers and existing literature on widening participation. The work allowed us to obtain a detailed understanding of developments in higher education.

Survey of unplaced applicants from the 2006 UCAS application cycle

7 UCAS conducted the survey on our behalf. In December 2007 UCAS emailed 63,000 unplaced applicants for places in the 2006 cycle, asking them to take part in a short survey, and providing a link to the on-line questionnaire. In total, 4,900 unplaced applicants completed the questionnaire. Our analysis focused on the 2,900 who agreed to allow UCAS to pass their personal details to the National Audit Office, a response rate of five per cent. The data were then weighted to better reflect the characteristics of all unplaced applicants. The findings are used qualitatively.

8 Respondents were asked about what they had done instead of taking a place through UCAS, reasons for not taking up a place, intention to reapply, satisfaction with the amount of information, advice and guidance they received throughout the application process, opinion on the fairness of the process and readiness to reveal personal information in the application process.

Survey of teachers

9 Ipsos-MORI interviewed 1,000 primary and secondary teachers in England and Wales by telephone in November 2007. The survey is intended to be representative of teachers rather than schools. The teachers were drawn from a sample of 4,088 maintained primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, with probability of selection proportionate to size. Size of school was determined by the number of pupils on roll and was used as a proxy for the number of teachers per institution. This sampling approach was used to ensure that all teachers had an equal chance of participating in the survey. The sample comprised maintained primary and secondary schools in England and Wales including county, voluntary aided/controlled and foundation schools, but excluded nursery schools, special schools and Pupil Referral Units and further education and sixth form colleges. Quotas were set on Government Office Region, phase (primary or secondary), and gender and age of teachers to reflect the proportion known to be in each category. At the analysis stage, data were weighted by age.

10 Teachers were asked their opinion about the barriers preventing pupils entering higher education; the forms of help schools have received to assist their pupils in entering higher education; the quality and quantity of assistance that has been given; and, what they thought would most assist their pupils in entering higher education.

Consulting with experts in the field

11 We interviewed representatives of the Department, the Funding Council and the Office for Fair Access to examine the coverage of widening participation issues across all of their statutory responsibilities, including regulatory activities, funding, evaluation and research, and dissemination of good practice.

12 We consulted with experts in the field as well as representatives from the following stakeholder groups and independent bodies:

- Action on Access
- Association of Colleges
- Association of Graduate Recruiters
- Brightside Trust (provider of e-mentoring schemes for disadvantaged students)
- Confederation of British Industry
- National Union of Students
- Other institutions: Kingston University, Westminster University
- Researchers: Dr Anna Vignoles, Institute of Education and Professor Stephen Gorard, School of Education, University of Birmingham.
- Supporting Professionalism in Admissions
- UCAS
- Universities UK

13 Six experts in the field considered the emerging findings from our work and helped shape our report and recommendations. They were: Jill Johnson, Head of Outreach, UCAS; Professor Rhiannon Evans and Professor John Storan, Directors and Regional Advisors, Action on Access; a senior representative from Universities UK; Professor Stephen Gorard, School of Education, University of Birmingham; Dr Anna Vignoles, Senior Lecturer and Researcher, Institute of Education.

APPENDIX TWO

Data on institutional performance 2002-03 to 2006-07 and bursaries

Figure 16 presents the performance between 2002-03 and 2006-07 of higher education institutions in England across four widening participation indicators for full-time undergraduate students: the proportion of young entrants from state schools; young entrants from lower socio-economic backgrounds; young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods; and the proportion of mature entrants from low participation neighbourhoods with no previous higher education qualification. The figure presents information that is publicly available via the Higher Education Statistics Agency website, which is based on data submitted annually to the Agency by all publicly-funded higher education institutions in England.

Annual performance is presented in relation to each institution's benchmark. A benchmark is the institution's expected performance taking into account the average for institutions of similar type, the profile of entry qualifications of its students, the subjects they studied, and their age. For each institution a range around the benchmark is calculated, which accounts for the size of the institution and the random variation in performance that is expected. If an institution's performance is within this range then its performance is similar to that expected and not significantly different to its benchmark, presented as a grey circle. If an institution's performance is above

this range its performance is significantly better than its benchmark and this is presented with a green circle. Conversely, if an institution's performance is below this range its performance is significantly worse than its benchmark and this is presented as a red circle. Where there is no data available for the year, a 'not applicable' (N/A) appears. This is the case when an institution merges or is newly established, there are too few individuals within a category to provide meaningful analysis, or there have been issues with data collection.

There has been a change in way that the two indicators for young and mature entrants from low participation neighbourhoods have been calculated for 2006-07. An updated version of the 'Participation of Local Areas' data has been issued {POLAR2} which has been used as the base for the 2006-07 indicator. Therefore it is not possible to directly compare the 2006-07 low participation indicators with previous years.

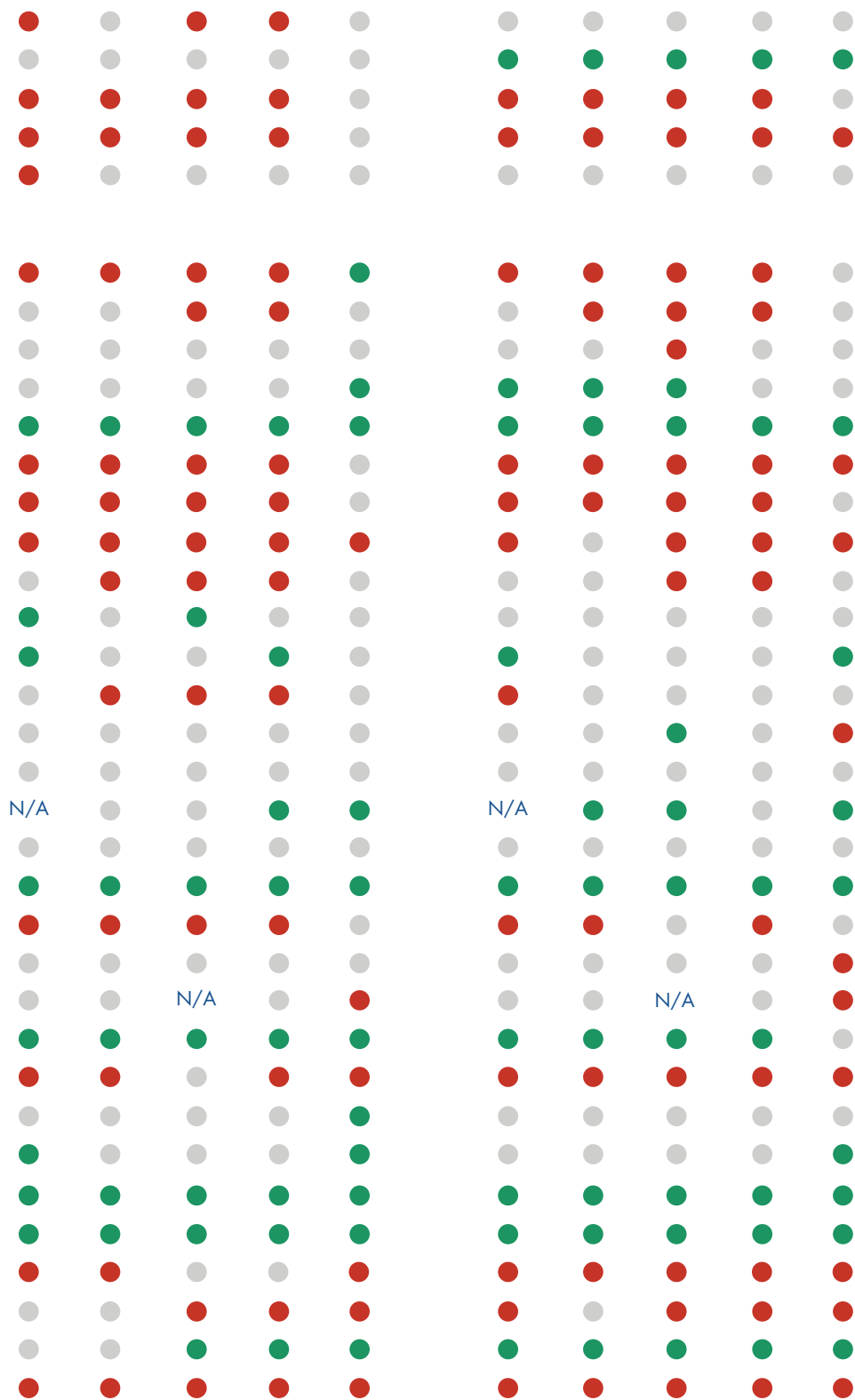
16 Data on institutional performance 2002-03 to 2006-07

	State schools					NS-SEC 4-7 (lower socio-economic backgrounds)				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Pre-1992 institutions (excluding the Russell Group)										
Aston University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Bath	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Bradford	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Brunel University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
City University, London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Durham	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of East Anglia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Essex	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Exeter	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Goldsmiths College, University of London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Hull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Keele University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Kent	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Lancaster	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Leicester	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Loughborough University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Queen Mary, University of London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Reading	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Royal Holloway, University of London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Salford	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Surrey	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Sussex	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of York	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
The Russell Group										
University of Birmingham	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Bristol	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Cambridge	●	●	●	N/A	●	●	●	●	N/A	●
Imperial College London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
King's College London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Leeds	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Liverpool	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
London School of Economics and Political Science	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Manchester	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Nottingham	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

16 Data on institutional performance 2002-03 to 2006-07 *continued*

	State schools					NS-SEC 4-7 (lower socio-economic backgrounds)				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
<i>The Russell Group continued</i>										
University of Oxford	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Sheffield	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Southampton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University College London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Warwick	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<i>Post-1992 Institutions</i>										
Anglia Ruskin University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bath Spa University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Bedfordshire	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Birmingham City University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Bolton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bournemouth University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Brighton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Buckinghamshire New University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Canterbury Christ Church University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Central Lancashire	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Chester	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Chichester	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Coventry University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
De Montfort University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Derby	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of East London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Edge Hill University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Gloucestershire	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Greenwich	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Hertfordshire	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Huddersfield	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kingston University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Leeds Metropolitan University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Lincoln	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Liverpool Hope University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Liverpool John Moores University	●	●	●	●	●	N/A	●	●	●	●
London Metropolitan University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
London South Bank University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Manchester Metropolitan University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Middlesex University	●	●	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Low participation neighbourhoods					Mature – No previous HE and from low participation neighbourhood				
2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07



16 Data on institutional performance 2002-03 to 2006-07 *continued*

	State schools					NS-SEC 4-7 (lower socio-economic backgrounds)				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
<i>Post-1992 Institutions continued</i>										
University of Northampton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nottingham Trent University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Oxford Brookes University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Plymouth	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Portsmouth	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Roehampton University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sheffield Hallam University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Southampton Solent University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Staffordshire University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Sunderland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Teesside	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Thames Valley University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of the West of England, Bristol	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Westminster	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Winchester	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Wolverhampton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University of Worcester	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
York St John University	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<i>Small/specialist institutions</i>										
University College Birmingham	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Arts Institute at Bournemouth	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Central School of Speech and Drama	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama	●	●	●	●	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Courtauld Institute of Art	●	●	●	●	●	N/A	●	●	●	●
University College for the Creative Arts	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cumbria Institute of the Arts (part of the University of Cumbria since August 2007)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dartington College of Arts (merged with University College Falmouth in April 2008)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University College Falmouth	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guildhall School of Music and Drama	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Harper Adams University College	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Heythrop College	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	●

16 Data on institutional performance 2002-03 to 2006-07 *continued*

	State schools					NS-SEC 4-7 (lower socio-economic backgrounds)				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
<i>Small and specialist institutions continued</i>										
Leeds College of Music	N/A	N/A	N/A	●	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	●	●
Leeds Trinity and All Saints	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
University of the Arts, London	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Newman University College	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Norwich School of Art and Design	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
University College Plymouth St Mark and St John	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rose Bruford College	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Royal Academy of Music	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Royal Agricultural College	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Royal College of Music	●	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Royal Northern College of Music	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Royal Veterinary College	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
St George's Hospital Medical School	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
St Martin's College (part of the University of Cumbria since August 2007)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
St Mary's University College, Twickenham	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
School of Oriental and African Studies	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
School of Pharmacy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance	●	N/A	●	●	●	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	●
Wimbledon School of Art (now part of the University of the Arts London)	●	●	●	●	N/A	●	●	●	●	N/A
Writtle College	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Key

- performance significantly worse than benchmark
- performance significantly better than benchmark
- performance not significantly different to benchmark

Figure 17 presents the proportion and amount of additional tuition fee income spent by higher education institutions in England on financial support to students in 2006-07, the most recent year for which this data is available, estimated for 2008-09, and the value of

minimum bursaries available to students entering higher education in 2008 from households with incomes below the threshold for eligibility for full maintenance grant. Each institution sets its own bursary policy and the value of bursaries available.

17 Bursaries

	Proportion of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (%)	Amount of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (£000s)	Estimated proportion of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (%)	Estimated amount of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (£000s)	Value of minimum bursary available to students in 2008 from households with income below £25,000 (£)
Pre-1992 institutions (excluding the Russell Group)					
Aston University	19.9	571	17.0	1,201	480
University of Bath	20.1	731	22.6	2,164	1,200
University of Bradford	19.6	610	30.8	2,718	700
Brunel University	13.0	633	9.4	1,300	1,000
City University, London	19.1	446	16.9	1,058	750
University of Durham	27.1	1,448	29.1	5,188	1,285
University of East Anglia	22.3	1,216	16.4	1,959	600
University of Essex	9.3	330	16.4	1,476	310
University of Exeter	17.1	916	20.8	3,314	1,500
Goldsmiths College, University of London	21.8	656	15.5	1,596	500
University of Hull	22.7	1,129	28.0	1,986	1,000
Keele University	11.5	329	15.3	1,229	310
University of Kent	18.4	887	21.1	2,850	1,000
Lancaster University	17.6	699	18.4	2,314	500
University of Leicester	19.8	823	17.7	2,125	1010
Loughborough University	13.8	704	16.2	2,497	1,360
Queen Mary, University of London	31.2	1403	32.3	4,579	1,050
Royal Holloway, University of London	17.5	401	23.7	1,862	500
University of Reading	22.3	978	27.2	3,658	1,350
University of Salford	11.8	663	16.0	2,693	310
University of Surrey	17.2	430	31.2	2,265	750
University of Sussex	19.6	644	16.5	1,950	1,000
University of York	17.1	655	19.2	2,005	1,400
Average	18.8	752	20.7	2,347	864

17 Bursaries *continued*

	Proportion of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (%)	Amount of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (£000s)	Estimated proportion of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (%)	Estimated amount of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (£000s)	Value of minimum bursary available to students in 2008 from households with income below £25,000 (£)
The Russell Group					
University of Birmingham	18.9	1,416	14.7	2,365	840
University of Bristol	18.4	935	20.2	3,527	1,160
University of Cambridge	19.4	1,300	29.4	5,800	3,150
Imperial College London	31.1	840	29.0	2,436	3,000
King's College London	21.1	897	25.0	3,940	1,250
University of Leeds	15.8	1,500	20.1	5,900	1,500
University of Liverpool	26.8	1,410	30.3	6,028	1,365
London School of Economics and Political Science	26.1	330	24.6	1,020	1,044
University of Manchester	29.0	2,699	28.4	8,370	1,000
Newcastle University	15.9	1,036	18.8	2,606	930
University of Nottingham	22.9	1,786	19.3	4,816	1,050
University of Oxford	35.2	1,876	30.0	5,156	3,150
University of Sheffield	14.9	970	13.5	2,696	420
University of Southampton	14.3	848	19.8	3,203	1,000
University College London	38.5	1,609	31.5	3,900	1,418
University of Warwick	16.6	784	25.0	3,627	1,800
Average	21.9	1,265	23.4	4,087	1,505
Post-1992 Institutions					
Anglia Ruskin University	29.5	1,192	25.1	2,814	810
Bath Spa University	28.1	855	27.4	2,089	310
University of Bedfordshire	40.0	1,359	15.3	1,579	615
Birmingham City University	13.4	645	14.7	2,365	525
University of Bolton	16.0	326	21.4	1,109	320
Bournemouth University	27.5	1,224	27.0	2,430	550
University of Brighton	21.8	1,268	26.4	5,100	1,050
Buckinghamshire New University	35.5	731	37.0	2,469	500
Canterbury Christ Church University	19.5	711	28.6	2,591	820
University of Central Lancashire	40.8	3,119	52.9	10,610	1,000
University of Chester	25.3	915	22.3	2,683	1,000
University of Chichester	21.8	420	25.2	1,389	1,050
Coventry University	28.4	1,250	10.5	1,528	310

17 Bursaries *continued*

	Proportion of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (%)	Amount of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (£000s)	Estimated proportion of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (%)	Estimated amount of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (£000s)	Value of minimum bursary available to students in 2008 from households with income below £25,000 (£)
<i>Post-1992 Institutions continued</i>					
University of Cumbria (merger of former Cumbria Institute of the Arts and St Martin's College in August 2007)	Not applicable	Not applicable	40.0	4,429	1,260
De Montfort University	14.8	1,143	20.4	4,000	400
University of Derby	24.7	931	30.0	3,399	800
University of East London	30.3	1,740	12.9	1,704	310
Edge Hill University	34.9	1,270	35.0	3,304	500
University of Gloucestershire	17.9	554	19.4	2,044	310
University of Greenwich	6.6	185	10.1	523	Lower fees
University of Hertfordshire	37.6	2,812	24.7	5,479	1,413
University of Huddersfield	18.7	1,122	25.0	3,400	500
Kingston University	15.1	1,179	23.7	5,700	600
Leeds Metropolitan University	1.3	43	0.5	46	Lower fees
University of Lincoln	39.3	1,937	13.8	2,000	610
Liverpool Hope University	22.9	834	31.9	2,724	600
Liverpool John Moores University	29.1	2,250	29.0	6,750	1,050
London Metropolitan University	18.6	1,353	38.2	6,864	775
London South Bank University	14.8	472	20.0	1,678	310
Manchester Metropolitan University	17.9	2,137	29.1	9,405	800
Middlesex University	5.8	422	51.3	800	310
University of Northampton	21.7	435	32.0	2,120	1,000
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	22.2	1,444	21.4	4,198	310
Nottingham Trent University	20.8	1,644	23.5	5,827	740
Oxford Brookes University	24.4	1,022	34.0	4,084	1,050
University of Plymouth	13.0	628	13.3	2,146	1,015
University of Portsmouth	15.2	983	29.2	3,906	900
Roehampton University	15.5	577	6.9	638	310
Sheffield Hallam University	22.5	1,958	19.6	4,350	700
Southampton Solent University	22.6	840	25.3	2,969	500
Staffordshire University	24.9	1,223	33.4	4,254	850
University of Sunderland	18.9	752	35.2	4,129	525
University of Teesside	38.3	1,375	28.5	3,110	1,000
Thames Valley University	24.6	662	35.2	2,889	1,030

17 Bursaries *continued*

	Proportion of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (%)	Amount of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (£000s)	Estimated proportion of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (%)	Estimated amount of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (£000s)	Value of minimum bursary available to students in 2008 from households with income below £25,000 (£)
<i>Post-1992 Institutions continued</i>					
University of the West of England, Bristol	25.5	1,974	29.1	6,607	750
University of Westminster	12.7	783	19.9	3,254	310
University of Winchester	24.2	481	28.0	1,848	820
University of Wolverhampton	16.3	956	33.5	5,400	500
University of Worcester	15.2	351	21.8	1,714	750
York St John University	30.3	441	30.9	1,374	525
Average	22.3	1,061	25.5	3,356	687
<i>Small/specialist institutions</i>					
University College Birmingham	19.6	242	25.1	910	1,050
Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln	33.1	250	36.8	816	1,050
Arts Institute at Bournemouth	15.5	164	16.3	546	310
Central School of Speech and Drama	4.5	17	28.0	317	310
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama	20.4	148	24.5	441	1,650
Courtauld Institute of Art	13.6	12	26.7	48	310
University College for the Creative Arts	7.9	211	26.9	2,105	310
Cumbria Institute of the Arts	25.4	127	Part of University of Cumbria since August 2007		
Dartington College of Arts	11.7	31	Merged with University College Falmouth in April 2008		
University College Falmouth	15.4	159	26.0	1,148	850
Guildhall School of Music and Drama	12.0	25	Not available	Not available	1,418
Harper Adams University College	20.6	130	14.8	178	750
Leeds College of Music	16.6	42	15.0	190	770
Leeds Trinity and All Saints	Not available	Not available	11.7	280	Lower fees + £284
Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	7.7	25	9.3	92	524
University of the Arts London	9.9	545	12.2	1,698	310
Newman University College	35.0	455	35.6	1,109	800
Norwich School of Art and Design	9.9	58	12.8	279	567

17 Bursaries *continued*

	Proportion of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (%)	Amount of additional tuition fee income redistributed as bursaries in 2006-07 (£000s)	Estimated proportion of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (%)	Estimated amount of additional tuition fee income to be redistributed as bursaries in 2008-09 (£000s)	Value of minimum bursary available to students in 2008 from households with income below £25,000 (£)
<i>Small/specialist institutions continued</i>					
University College Plymouth St Mark and St John	31.9	351	31.2	898	Lower fees + Laptop
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication	7.5	40	19.3	215	310
Rose Bruford College	7.3	29	12.4	124	310
Royal Academy of Music	33.7	35	19.7	65	630
Royal Agricultural College	13.7	35	20.2	234	1,575
Royal College of Music	5.8	7	7.1	17	1,000
Royal Northern College of Music	14.6	37	20.0	124	1,050
Royal Veterinary College	26.1	142	35.7	634	1,650
St George's Hospital Medical School	19.4	114	19.8	423	1,200
St. Martin's College	48.4	1,100	Part of University of Cumbria since August 2007		
St Mary's University College, Twickenham	19.6	399	34.2	1,379	860
School of Oriental and African Studies	11.1	111	17.7	580	740
School of Pharmacy	14.6	35	25.0	215	500
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance	7.2	20	12.9	139	1,000
Writtle College	2.6	9	14.0	260	Lower fees
Average	18.4	161	21.5	533	784

Source: Office for Fair Access

DEFINITIONS

Access Course	Alternative qualification at level 3 which provides another route into higher education for those without A level or vocational qualifications.
Aimhigher	Government outreach programme designed to raise the awareness, aspirations and attainment of young people.
Bursary	Financial assistance provided to students by higher education institutions. Required following the introduction of variable tuition fees.
Benchmarks	Expected performance of an institution taking into account factors which contribute to the differences between institutions – range of subjects studied, qualification of students on entry and age of students on entry.
Compact	Arrangement between an institution and a school whereby consideration is given to a student's circumstances for entry into higher education.
Credit	An indicator of the amount and level of learning that is expected or has been achieved.
Fair Access	Increasing opportunities for people from under-represented groups to attend higher education institutions and courses which offer the highest financial returns.
Further education college	Institutions that may deliver higher education in addition to their primary role of delivering further education.
Foundation Degree	Employment-related higher education qualifications, at level 5 in the National Qualifications Framework just below Honours degree level. Typically two years long when studied full-time and offered by both higher and further education institutions.
Full-time student	Students are recorded as studying full-time if they are charged a full-time fee and are normally required to attend the institution for periods amounting to at least 24 weeks within the year of study; and during that time they are normally expected to undertake periods of study, tuition or work experience which amount to an average of at least 21 hours per week.
Free School Meals	School pupils that meet certain criteria can be eligible for free school meals. To fall into this category, pupils' parents must generally be receiving income support.
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education, normally taken by 15-18 year olds in schools and colleges.

Higher education	Higher education courses lead to qualifications which are above the standard of A levels or equivalent. They include foundation degrees, Honours degrees, undergraduate credits, Higher National Diplomas, Higher National Certificates and other higher education diplomas. For the purpose of this report, the definition excludes postgraduate study.
Higher education institution (hereafter 'institution')	Institution funded to deliver higher education. For the purpose of this report, the definition includes colleges and other institutions that deliver higher education.
Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI)	Indicator of the percentage of children in an area that live in families that are income deprived (i.e. in receipt of income support, income based jobseekers' allowance, working families' tax credit or disabled person's tax credit below a given threshold).
Index of multiple deprivation (IMD)	Combines a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues, into a single deprivation score for each small area in England.
Increasing participation	Expanding the proportion of the population who enter higher education.
Lifelong Learning Network	Funding Council funded national, area and regional collaborations involving institutions in a defined area which aim to create new opportunities for vocational learners.
Low participation neighbourhoods	For the current performance indicators, defined as the 20 per cent of wards with the lowest rates of higher education participation.
Mature student	Those students who are aged 21 or over at 30 September of the academic year in which they are recorded as entering the institution.
Outreach	Activities which involve going into communities, schools and colleges encouraging participants to consider higher education as an option.
Part-time student	Students are recorded as studying part-time if they do not meet the definition of full-time study or sandwich year-out.
Performance indicator	Statistical measure of how an institution is performing
Post-1992 institutions	Higher education institutions that were granted university status following the removal of the divide between the former polytechnics and the pre-1992 institutions.
Pre-1992 institutions	Group of institutions who were given university status before 1992. For this study we have separated out those in the Russell Group.
Prior attainment	Achievement prior to higher education, usually at GCSE, A Level or equivalent
Progression agreement	An agreement between partner institutions, schools and colleges which clarifies entry requirements onto specific higher education courses for vocational learners.
Recruiting institutions	Institutions whose courses are generally under-subscribed and need to undertake recruitment activities to attract applicants.
Russell Group institution	Association of 20 self-selected major research intensive institutions of the UK, 16 of which are English institutions.

Selecting institutions	Institutions whose courses are generally over-subscribed and are able to select students from the pool of applicants.
Socio-economic class	<p>The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification scheme assigns individuals to a class based on their occupation and employment status. For young people, under the age of 21, applying to higher education through UCAS, they are classified on the basis of the occupation of the highest wage-earner in their household. The scheme consists of eight groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – Higher managerial and professional occupations 2 – Lower managerial and professional occupations 3 – Intermediate occupations 4 – Small employers and own account workers 5 – Lower supervisory and technical occupations 6 – Semi-routine occupations 7 – Routine occupations 8 – Never worked and long-term unemployed <p>The classes are grouped into two broad categories to monitor participation in higher education:</p> <p>Classes 1–3: upper socio-economic backgrounds</p> <p>Classes 4–7: lower socio-economic backgrounds</p> <p>Those with a background from Class 8 are typically excluded from monitoring schemes. It should also be noted that socio-economic class is usually derived from the student's reporting of their highest earning parent's occupation, so can be subject to error.</p>
Tariff score	Number of points allocated to the achievement of qualifications on the basis of an assessment by UCAS. Certain higher education courses require the achievement of specific scores.
Undergraduate	Student working towards a first degree, higher education certificate, diploma or equivalent.
Under-represented groups	Groups of individuals with a specific characteristic whose representation in higher education is less than that in the general population.
Vocational qualifications	Qualifications that relate to a learner's current, future or intended employment. These may include: vocational GCSEs and A Levels; NVQs; BTECs; apprenticeships.

UCAS

Formerly known as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, an organisation funded and governed by UK higher education institutions. It runs the single system used by the majority of universities and about 100 further education colleges to manage applications and offers for places on full-time undergraduate courses. It is not commonly used for applications for further education or part-time courses.

Widening participation

Reducing the differences in participation rates between different groups in the higher education population by encouraging applications from, and increasing the participation of, individuals from groups that are under-represented in higher education in relation to the general population.

Young students

Those students who are aged under 21 at 30 September of the academic year in which they are recorded as entering the institution.

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