

UCAS Submission to Select Committee Inquiry into under-achievement in education by white working class children

Executive Summary

UCAS believes that tackling the issue of educational disadvantage must extend beyond the schooling years and that a holistic view needs to be taken by all those involved in education and progression. This submission looks at the Higher Education (HE) application rates for working class pupils, application rates to HE by ethnic group and the split by sex. It suggests that it is not just the disadvantaged white males who are under-represented and that attention should focus on a wider group of disadvantaged male applicants. It highlights the importance of transparent information and guidance alongside sustained outreach from an early age, as well as the need to address the importance of different qualification routes.

Introduction

1. UCAS is the UK provider of shared admissions services for Higher Education (HE). UCAS' mission is to help all applicants to make the right choices for the right reasons with the right outcomes whether this is in their transition to work based, vocational training and apprenticeships or in taking other academic routes as well as facilitating (where appropriate) access to Higher Education.
2. UCAS is seen by schools, colleges, universities and students as a credible source for information on both the process of making applications and the range of education and training opportunities available. UCAS therefore has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that all young people are engaged in exploring and making informed learning and career choices, and that they are supported in realising their aspirations and potential. UCAS also has a central role in supporting the higher education and schools and college sector through the provision of data that will help to identify potential barriers to young people achieving their aspirations through progression into HE.
3. UCAS Progress is a division of UCAS and is a UK provider of Course Search and Application services and online information and career planning tools for 12-19 year olds, currently focused on supporting applications to post-16 education and training.
4. UCAS provides impartial information and advice, career and course information services which are available to 640,000 Year 10 and Year 11 learners, and application services to post-16 opportunities at over 4,000 schools, 6th Form and FE colleges and work-based learning providers.

Why UCAS wishes to submit evidence to this Committee?

5. UCAS recognises that there are a multitude of factors which contribute to under-achievement in education by white working class children, and that there has been extensive research conducted in this area. We believe that the issue of tackling educational disadvantage extends beyond the schooling years, and UK universities also recognise the moral, social and economic imperative to address educational disadvantage.
6. In his report on social mobility, Alan Milburn concluded that education and employability are the keys that can unlock both the individual citizen's and national progress. To this end, UCAS believes that accessing higher education is a key piece in the jigsaw of helping to unlock potential and raise aspirations. We concur that who gets into HE (and how they get on once they have left) will have a critical role in determining Britain's future. Comprehensive outreach to prospective students, including early outreach to younger learners, and equity in admissions is not only essential for social cohesion and mobility, but also to enable the UK to develop human capital to support individual well-being and national prosperity.

Evidence

7. Whilst UCAS is not in a position to define what constitutes 'underachievement' for the purposes of this submission, UCAS can provide evidence on those students who apply to HE but are unsuccessful in gaining a place at any HE institution (including through Clearing). We recognise that underachievement for the purposes of this Select Committee extends beyond this remit, including individuals who don't reach the stage of aspiring to apply to HE, but UCAS considers it useful to look at any patterns which may affect underachievement in accessing HE.
8. UCAS holds data on applicants who apply to HE from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addressing some of the factors considered to be responsible for under-achievement, evidence provided will take into account factors such as parental occupation and POLAR2 data of those applying to HE, differences between males and females applying to HE and the mixed profiles of qualifications types.

UCAS can offer the following information for consideration by the Committee:

HE Application Rates for Working Class Pupils

9. Here we assume POLAR2 as a proxy for defining areas which are more likely to contain working class families and pupils and take analysis from the UCAS 2013 Demand Report.¹ The focus is on application rates which are a measure of the proportion of the population submitting an application for HE through UCAS.

¹ <http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-demand-report-2013.pdf>

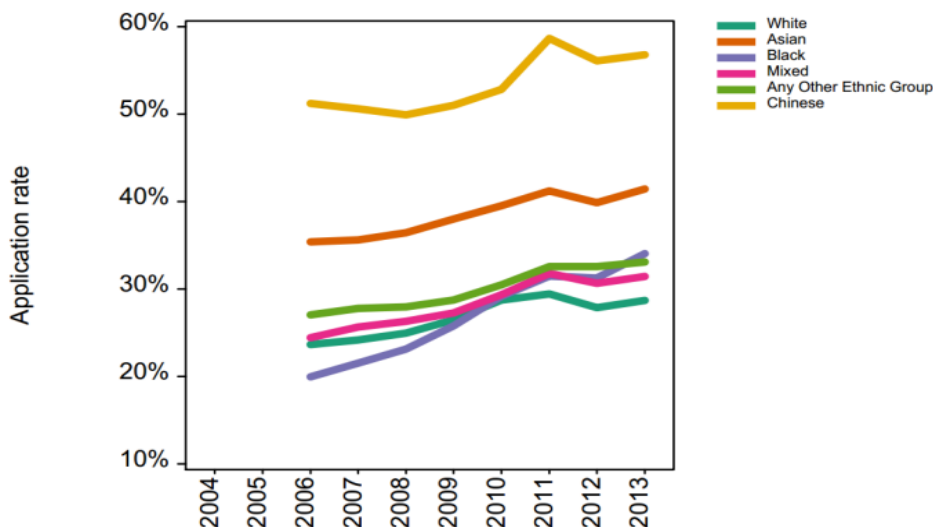
10. Further details on POLAR and its relativity to other measures of advantage in England can be found on the HEFCE website.²
11. UCAS data (Figure 7 UCAS 2013 Demand Report) shows the application rates for English 18 year olds by POLAR2, where quintile 5 (Q5) represents the most advantaged areas and quintile 1 (Q1) the most disadvantaged areas. Application rates for 18 year olds in England from all backgrounds have increased since 2004, with the largest increases for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The application rate of young people living in the most disadvantaged areas has increased by over 70 per cent (proportionally) between 2004 and 2013. This compares to an increase of 10 per cent proportionally in the most advantaged areas.
12. In 2013, 18 year olds living in the most advantaged areas are 2.7 times more likely to apply for HE than those living in the most disadvantaged areas. This is substantially less of a differential than in 2004, when 18 year olds living in the most advantaged areas were 4.3 times more likely to apply for HE than those living in the most disadvantaged areas. This reduction is a result of the relatively larger growth in demand from disadvantaged areas over this period.
13. Figure 9 in the Demand Report 2013 shows the application rates for 18 year olds in England by Free School Meal (FSM) status at age 15, 2006 to 2013. Pupils in independent schools are treated as not in receipt of FSMs for this measure. On these definitions around 13% of the 18 year old population were in receipt of FSMs when aged 15. The application rate for 18 year olds in 2013 who were previously in receipt of FSMs is 15% compared with 33% for those not in receipt of FSMs. Pupils who had not been in receipt of FSMs were more than twice as likely to apply to HE in 2013 than those who had been in receipt of FSMs.
14. In 2012, when the higher and more variable fees were introduced, the application rate of those not in receipt of FSMs fell by 1.5 percentage points (4.7% proportionally). In comparison, the application rate of those in receipt of FSMs fell by 0.1 percentage points (0.8% proportionally). In 2013, the application rates increase for both groups by around 3.5% proportionally (and the application rate for those in receipt of FSMs reached a new recorded high).

² <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/wp/ourresearch/polar/>

Ethnicity

15. The analysis in the UCAS 2013 Demand Report ³ is extended within the report to consider application rates by POLAR2 to Higher Tariff Institutions (Fig.23) and also by the ethnicity of those in state education.

Figure 10 Application rates for English 18 year olds by ethnic group (state schools)



16. Administrative records (source National Pupil Database, Department for Education) record an ethnic group for pupils in English state schools. This allows, through the same record linking method as used for the free school meal application rates, the application rate of pupils in each ethnic group to be estimated (this will be slightly lower than the actual value because only unambiguous links between the data sources are used).
17. There is a large range in the population size of the different groups. For instance, there are around 500,000 pupils recorded in the White ethnic group compared to around 2,000 pupils recorded in the Chinese ethnic group. This analysis uses the major group level classification of ethnic groups; it is possible that more detailed ethnic groups would show different application rate levels and trends.
18. Figure 10 shows the application rates by ethnic group estimated using this method. The application rate of pupils from all ethnic groups increases over the period. All ethnic groups also show the national pattern of a decrease against trend in application rates in 2012 followed by a return to increases in 2013 at approximately the trend rate. There are differences in both the level and trend rate of growth between groups.
19. Across the period, the Chinese ethnic group have consistently higher application rates, more than 50 per cent on this measure, compared with the other groups. The Asian ethnic group have an application rate of around 40% on this measure in 2013. The Black, Mixed,

³ <http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-demand-report-2013.pdf>

White and Other ethnic groups have application rates in a relatively narrow range in 2013 between 29% (White) and 34% (Black). The largest increase in application rates across the period, and the largest increase in 2013, is observed for the Black ethnic group, for these pupils the application rate has increased from 20% in 2006 to 34% in 2013 (a 70% proportional increase).

Are application rates significantly worse for white working class boys than girls?

20. Around 44% of the young English cohort applies to HE by age 19. The analysis in the UCAS 2013 Demand Report (Figure 8) shows how this national rate is a mixture of different rates for men and women. For the cohort aged 18 in 2012, more (49%) women than men (38%) applied to HE by age 19. For this cohort young women are 29% more likely to apply than young men. This difference is slightly larger than in recent cycles, but within the range seen over the period.

21. If we compare POLAR2 quintiles against the mean proportion of men and women between 2006 and 2013 (Table 1), we see that the percentage of men applying to HE decreases as the extent of disadvantage increases, but the reverse is the case for females.

Table 1 English 18 year old state school Applicants at March 24 Deadline 2006 - 2013. Split by sex (mean average over period)

POLAR2 Quintile	Mean proportion men 06-13	Mean proportion women 06-13
1	42%	58%
2	43%	57%
3	43%	57%
4	44%	56%
5	46%	54%

22. If we compare the ethnic group of English 18 year olds who fall into the POLAR2 quintile 1 (most disadvantaged) by male and female split (Table 2), we see that the most disadvantaged male applicants are in the Black (39%), Mixed (39%) and White (40%) ethnic groups. For females, it is the reverse with Asian (57%) and Chinese (53%) being proportionally lower.

Table 2 Ethnic group of English 18 year old state school Applicants from POLAR 2 Quintile 1 at March 24 Deadline 2006 - 2013. Split by sex (mean average over period)

Ethnic Group	Mean proportion men 06-13	Mean proportion women 06-13
Any Other Ethnic Group	44%	56%
Asian	43%	57%
Black	39%	61%
Chinese	47%	53%
Mixed	39%	61%
White	40%	60%

Total	42%	58%
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Does the qualification type impact on application and entry rates to Higher Education?

23. Additional data that the Committee may want to consider is the qualification type held by applicants and the effect that this has on entry rates. For example, young people in more advantaged areas are substantially more likely to enter HE and hold A-levels than those living in more disadvantaged areas. More data on this can be found in the UCAS 2012 End of Cycle Report.⁴
24. One area that we would highlight as becoming more important in understanding the trends for HE admissions between different groups is the nature of qualification chosen post 16. In particular, the balance between a set of A levels and Vocational Qualifications, especially BTECs.
25. DfE analysis shows that the proportions of young people attaining level 3 through a BTEC qualification has increased very rapidly (from 3% of 19 year olds in 2004 to 16% in 2012), and the proportion qualified to level 3 with (solely) A levels is in sharp decline. The increase in the proportion of level 3 holders who have vocational qualifications has been disproportionately large for those in more disadvantaged groups where it is now the case that more gain level 3 through BTECs than A levels.
26. Separate DfE data on exam entries shows that the proportion of students entered for purely academic qualifications has been in steady decline in recent years – from 70% in 2008 to 51% in 2012.⁵
27. We see this reflected in our application data with around half of higher performing accepted applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds holding BTECs, compared to fewer than one in ten from more advantaged groups. This may restrict choice for certain types of applicants as higher performing students holding BTECs are almost entirely absent from certain types of institutions.

Conclusions

28. The data shows us that whilst applications to HE from the more disadvantaged groups are increasing, there is still a gulf between those applying from quintile 1 (most disadvantaged areas) and quintile 5 (most advantaged). Pupils who had not been receipt of FSMs were more than twice as likely to apply to HE in 2013 than those who had been in receipt of FSMs.
29. Data on the application rates by ethnic groups shows that whilst the Chinese and Asian ethnic groups have relatively high application rates, the Black, Mixed, White and Other ethnic

⁴ <http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-end-of-cycle-report-2012.pdf>

⁵ Department for Education. Statistical First Release- Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England, 2011 <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001072/index.shtml>

groups have application rates in a relatively narrow range in 2013 with White applicants having the lowest application rate across the period. The largest increase in 2013, is observed for the Black ethnic group, where the application rate has increased from 20% in 2006 to 34% in 2013 (a 70% proportional increase).

30. It is also evident that there are large disparities between applications to HE from men and women, again further compounding the gap between the educational achievements of boys and girls during their secondary education.
31. It can be concluded that in terms of aspiring to HE, the gap between young men and women applying is significantly worse for men. Young women were a third more likely to enter HE in 2012 than men, and the majority of the fall in entry rate in 2012 was amongst men. Amongst 18 year olds, women were a third more likely to enter HE in 2012 than men. Women remain more likely to *enter* HE than men are to even *apply* to HE.
32. The proportion of men applying to HE also reduces as POLAR2 quintile increases (i.e. the extent of disadvantage increases). So the more disadvantaged young men are, the less likely they are to aspire to pursue HE.
33. In addressing the extent of underachievement within the context of progression into HE, it can be concluded from the above evidence that despite there being increases in applications to HE from disadvantaged young people, 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are still 2.7 times more likely to apply for HE.

Recommendations

34. To be able to address the issue of under-achievement in education by white working class children, an holistic approach needs to be taken by all those involved in education and progression, starting from early years through to secondary and higher education and into employability and lifelong learning. This requires consistent and regular intervention, targeted particular at those groups who are most at risk of dropping out of education or becoming a NEET.
35. Our evidence also suggests that it is not just the disadvantaged white males who are under-represented, certainly in applying to HE. Our data would suggest that the Committee needs to focus on the needs of a much wider group of disadvantaged male applicants including the black and mixed ethnic groups.
36. It is the more disadvantaged groups who may typically require further advice, guidance and support whether it be to progress into their chosen career or onto HE. This point was strongly communicated to us in a survey that UCAS conducted of young learners in 2012 (*Post-16 Learners' Decision Making, Information and Communication Needs, September 2012*). Young people want information about HE as early as possible to ensure that they don't make

option-limiting decisions at Key Stage 4 and 5. To help achieve this, transparent information, advice and guidance are key, extending to pupils, teachers, advisers and parents.

37. Through the evidence we have gathered from the Post-16 Learners' Survey, UCAS Progress proposes working to help facilitate and deliver this kind of outreach. Our unique position working across the secondary, further and higher education sectors means that we can play a pivotal role in ensuring that all young people are engaged in exploring and making education and career choices.

38. This evidence is concurrent with other research which shows that long term, sustained outreach is key to raising aspirations from an early age. OFFA is urging universities to consider drawing up plans for working with primary school children to raise their ambitions towards HE. Exploring and explaining possible outcomes and career paths can have a motivational effect on how students view the purpose of education and training, how they engage with their studies and develop positive aspirations. Universities need to continue to reach out to all potential applicants, for example through consistent and targeted outreach in the form of summer schools and visit days. Case studies also show that enabling undergraduates or student mentors to spend time in schools is an excellent way of inspiring young people by showing what can be achieved and the barriers that others have overcome. . Students who have participated in university summer schools are already expressly encouraged to include this information in their UCAS applications, and this information can be taken into consideration by admissions staff when applications are being assessed.

39. Additionally, we would recommend to the Committee that if under-represented children are to have a fair chance of entering the more selective universities, the issue of decreasing participation in A levels must be addressed.