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## University of Bath

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Social Mobility &  
Child Poverty  
Commission

# Higher Education: the Fair Access Challenge

**June 2013**

Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
[contact@smcpcommission.co.uk](mailto:contact@smcpcommission.co.uk)

## **Foreword**

We are blessed in Britain to have a world-leading higher education sector. Our universities are a great source of strength for the country and their role – in an increasingly knowledge-based economy - is becoming more and more central to our future prosperity. Universities are also becoming increasingly central to our future social prospects. Who gets in to university and how they get on once they have left will be crucial in determining whether Britain's sluggish rates of social mobility can be improved.

Last year the Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility published a report on these issues, focused mainly on England. *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility* made wide-ranging recommendations to government and the higher education sector about how they could make access fairer and participation wider. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission will build on that work and will continue to focus on the contribution made by universities.

In this short report, we summarise how universities have responded to the recommendations in *University Challenge*. We welcome the fact that the higher education sector is clearly taking social mobility issues seriously. We know that what happens in schools ultimately holds the key to who can participate in higher education. Government obviously has a key role but much more also needs to be done by universities to open their doors to a wider pool of talent and potential. There is widespread acknowledgement that the blame game – where universities blame schools, schools blame parents and everyone blames the Government - must stop. More importantly there is a lot of university action underway which will help make a difference. It is clear that there is an increasing determination on the part of our universities to do their bit in creating a Britain that is socially mobile. The challenge is to ensure that these good intentions translate into better outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.


This report provides new evidence about the scale of the fair access challenge we face. This evidence shows that some of our leading universities in particular have a long way to go: they have become more, not less, socially unrepresentative over time. The proportion of students at these institutions from state schools and from disadvantaged backgrounds is lower than it was a decade ago. This is unacceptable and must change.

If we want to see social progress and economic prosperity in an increasingly competitive global market, the principle we should, as a country, aim for is to ensure that all those who have the ability, aptitude and potential to benefit from a university education have a fair chance to do so. That requires a genuine national effort. It requires our schools to raise standards and aspirations amongst all their pupils, to equip them with the knowledge to make informed choices about their future. It requires our careers services to provide the information, advice and guidance young people need. It requires our government to pursue policies that enable people from the widest range of backgrounds to go to university. It requires our country to devote more of our national wealth to higher education. And it requires our universities to pursue approaches that broaden the social backgrounds of their students.

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission will continue to monitor the progress universities are making in achieving their social mobility objectives and will work together with the higher education sector to help drive change.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan Milburn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, Chair, Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gillian Shephard". The signature is written in a cursive style on a light yellow background.

The Rt. Hon. Baroness Gillian Shephard, Deputy Chair, Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

## **About the Commission**

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission is an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body established under the Child Poverty Act 2010 (as amended by the Welfare Reform Act 2012) with a remit to monitor the progress of government and others on child poverty and social mobility. It is made up of nine Commissioners, supported by a small secretariat. Its Chair is The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, and its Deputy Chair The Rt. Hon. Baroness Gillian Shephard.

The functions of the Commission include:

- Monitoring progress including implementation of the UK Child Poverty Strategy and the 2020 Child Poverty targets, and describing implementation of the Scottish and Welsh Strategies.
- Providing published advice to Ministers on matters relating to social mobility and child poverty.
- Undertaking social mobility advocacy.

This project was undertaken as part of the Commission's social mobility advocacy function. See <https://www.gov.uk/smcpc> for more details.

## **The Fair Access Challenge**

There is a long way to go before access to higher education can be said to be truly classless. Last year's report by the Independent Reviewer of Social Mobility and Child Poverty, *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility*<sup>1</sup>, found that there is a strong correlation between someone's social class and their likelihood of going to university and to the most selective universities in particular:

- While there has been much progress in widening participation (participation rates in the most disadvantaged geographical areas increased by 30% between 2004/05 and 2009/10) those in the most advantaged areas are still three times as likely to participate in higher education as those in the most disadvantaged areas<sup>2</sup>.
- There has been no improvement in participation at the most selective universities among the least advantaged young people since the mid-1990s and the most advantaged young people are seven times more likely to attend the most selective universities as the most disadvantaged<sup>3</sup>.
- The odds of a child at a state secondary school who is eligible for free school meals in Year 11 being admitted to Oxbridge by the age of 19 is almost 2,000 to 1 against. By contrast, the odds of a privately educated child being admitted to Oxbridge are 20 to 1<sup>4</sup>.

New analysis by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission emphasises the scale of the fair access challenge facing the United Kingdom at many of the most academically selective universities. In contrast to the overall progress made by the higher education sector in becoming more socially representative over the last decade, the most selective universities have, overall, become more socially exclusive. While there are some Russell Group universities that have become more representative over the past few years, overall their intake has become less socially representative, not more. The Commission's research (see Annex A) reveals:

- Although the estimated number of state school pupils entering Russell Group universities increased by 1,464 between 2002/03 and 2011/12 (a rise of 2.6%), almost half of the new places created at Russell Group institutions over the past decade have gone to privately educated individuals: the number of privately educated students entering these institutions increased by 1,426 (a rise of 7.9%).<sup>5</sup>
- As a consequence, the proportion of entrants who are state-educated and the proportion from less advantaged social groups were both lower in 2011/12 than in 2002/03. The proportion of young full-time undergraduate entrants to Russell Group universities who are from state schools has decreased, from 75.6% in 2002/03 to 74.6% in 2011/12. The proportion of young full-time undergraduate entrants to Russell Group universities who are from less advantaged social backgrounds (NS-SEC classes 4-7) has also decreased, from 19.9% in 2002/03 to 19.0% in 2011/12. This is illustrated in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Reviewer of Social Mobility and Child Poverty, *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility*, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Funding Council for England, *Trends in Young Participation in Higher Education*, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Office for Fair Access, *What More Can be Done to Widen Access to Highly Selective Universities - Annex C: Trends in Young Participation by Selectivity of Institution*, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Independent Reviewer analysis using data from Sutton Trust *Responding to the New Landscape for University Access*, 2010 and Department for Education *Schools, Pupils and their characteristics*, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Note that the most recent HESA data is from 2011-12: for example, it does not capture the increases in admissions from state schools from 58.8% to 63.3% in 2012-13 recently reported by the University of Cambridge in *Undergraduate Admissions Statistics – 2012 Cycle*, University of Cambridge (2013)

Table 1 – Social Background of Young Full-Time Undergraduate Entrants to Russell Group Institutions<sup>6</sup>

Institution	2002/03		2011/12		Change 2002/03-2011/12 percentage points (number)	
	% State educated	% NS-SEC 4-7	% State educated	% NS-SEC 4-7	% State educated	% NS-SEC 4-7
Birmingham	78.9% (3,523)	22.1% (987)	76.1% (3,497)	21.2% (974)	-2.8% (-26)	-0.9% (-13)
Bristol	63.8% (1,742)	13.7% (374)	59.9% (1,758)	13.0% (382)	-3.9% (+16)	-0.7% (+8)
Cambridge	57.6% (1,716)	11.3% (337)	57.9% (1,534)	10.3% (273)	0.3% (-182)	-1.0% (-64)
Cardiff	85.2% (3,148)	22.6% (835)	83.0% (3,254)	19.7% (772)	-2.2% (+105)	-2.9% (-63)
Durham	68.4% (2,151)	15.1% (475)	59.2% (1,749)	13.5% (399)	-9.2% (-402)	-1.6% (-76)
Edinburgh	65.7% (2,194)	17.8% (595)	70.3% (2,004)	16.5% (470)	4.6% (-191)	-1.3% (-124)
Exeter	67.1% (1,560)	15.0% (349)	67.4% (2,194)	15.2% (495)	0.3% (+634)	0.2% (+146)
Glasgow	89.2% (3,162)	22.9% (812)	87.8% (2,353)	20.5% (549)	-1.4% (-809)	-2.4% (-262)
Imperial	62.8% (898)	17.9% (256)	62.7% (821)	15.5% (203)	-0.1% (-77)	-2.4% (-53)
King's	70.3% (1,758)	22.8% (570)	70.7% (1,598)	22.6% (511)	0.4% (-160)	-0.2% (-59)
Leeds	76.7% (4,583)	19.9% (1,189)	72.9% (4,268)	18.4% (1,077)	-3.8% (-315)	-1.5% (-112)
Liverpool	86.2% (2,991)	25.2% (874)	87.6% (3,013)	22.0% (757)	1.4% (+22)	-3.2% (-118)
LSE	66.1% (453)	18.0% (123)	69.1% (473)	18.8% (129)	3.0% (+20)	0.8% (+5)
Manchester	79.9% (3,639)	21.7% (988)	77.0% (4,120)	20.4% (1,091)	-2.9% (+480)	-1.3% (+103)
Newcastle	73.8% (2,225)	20.4% (615)	69.2% (2,432)	19.5% (685)	-4.6% (+207)	-0.9% (+70)
Nottingham	72.9% (3,368)	16.9% (781)	73.0% (3,913)	19.1% (1,024)	0.1% (+545)	2.2% (+243)
Oxford	55.4% (1,651)	11.0% (328)	57.7% (1,552)	11.0% (296)	2.3% (-99)	0.0% (-32)
Queen Mary's	84.8% (1,420)	35.1% (588)	83.7% (2,005)	32.4% (776)	-1.1% (+584)	-2.7% (+188)
Queen's Belfast	99.8% (3,179)	36.0% (1,147)	97.6% (3,157)	31.4% (1,016)	-2.2% (-21)	-4.6% (-131)
Sheffield	82.6% (3,341)	19.0% (769)	83.7% (3,444)	17.8% (732)	1.1% (+103)	-1.2% (-36)
Southampton	80.9% (2,500)	18.6% (575)	83.8% (3,008)	19.2% (689)	2.9% (+509)	0.6% (+115)
UCL	61.4% (1,501)	17.8% (435)	64.7% (1,333)	16.3% (336)	3.3% (-168)	-1.5% (-99)
Warwick	77.8% (1,898)	17.8% (434)	73.3% (1,887)	18.6% (479)	-4.5% (-11)	0.8% (+45)
York	79.3% (1,471)	17.7% (328)	77.3% (2,168)	18.6% (522)	-2.0% (+697)	0.9% (+193)
<b>Russell Group</b>	<b>75.6% (56,073)</b>	<b>19.9% (14,763)</b>	<b>74.6% (57,537)</b>	<b>19.0% (14,637)</b>	<b>-0.9% (+1,464)</b>	<b>-0.9% (-126)</b>

- The intake of many of the most academically selective universities is more socially advantaged than would be expected given the social background of those with the necessary A-level grades to enter these institutions: there are an estimated 3,700 “missing” state educated students who have the grades to get into Russell Group universities in England but do not get the places (see Table 2 in Annex A). This analysis is based on the distance of each university from meeting their HESA benchmarks.
- One of the possible explanations for this gap is that many students who have the right grades do not apply to the most selective universities. For example, recent research suggests that, even after controlling for a range of factors, including A-level grades and the subjects taken at A-level, pupils from state schools need to be the equivalent of two grades better qualified than privately educated pupils to be as likely to apply to Russell Group universities<sup>7</sup>. Schools, further education colleges and universities all have an important role to play in tackling this ‘applications gap’, encouraging more students from less advantaged backgrounds to apply to the most selective universities.

<sup>6</sup> Higher Education Statistics Agency, *Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the United Kingdom: Widening Participation of Under-Represented Groups, Table 1b*, 2013. There is no data on the school and social background of a small minority of young undergraduate entrants. This analysis (and the analysis in Tables 2, 3 and 5) assumes that the available data is representative of all UK-domiciled young undergraduate entrants at each university to calculate figures for the numbers of entrants from state schools and NS-SEC 4-7 at each university.

<sup>7</sup> Boliver V. *How Fair is Access to More Prestigious UK Universities*, *British Journal of Sociology* 64:2 (2013)

- However, this on its own cannot explain the fair access gap: the research cited above also shows that among those who did apply, there is evidence of a state school ‘penalty’ in the admissions process equivalent to one A-level grade: that is to say, on average a state school student who applies to a Russell Group university would need to achieve one grade higher in their A-levels (e.g. AAB rather than ABB) to be as likely to be admitted to a Russell Group institution as an otherwise identical privately educated student<sup>8</sup>.
- These findings are echoed in analysis of applications to the University of Oxford in 2011 carried out by the Financial Times. This showed that those with very good GCSE results from independent schools were 74% more likely to apply to Oxford than their peers in the most disadvantaged state schools, though there was little or no ‘application gap’ for state schools with average levels of disadvantage (i.e. the issue of low application rates appeared to only affect those from the most disadvantaged schools). However, among those with very good GCSE results who did apply, pupils from independent schools were still over three times as likely to be admitted as those from the most disadvantaged state schools and were also 20% more likely to be admitted than those at the most advantaged 10% of state schools<sup>9</sup> (see Table 4 in Annex A).
- As Boliver (2013)<sup>10</sup> notes “*Why such disparities occur is not an easy question to answer*”. There are a number of possible drivers of the fair access gap but a lack of evidence about the relative importance of each one. Possible explanations that have been suggested include (among other things): low aspirations among students from less advantaged backgrounds and their parents and teachers, lack of knowledge of the applications process, not choosing the right subjects at A-level, under-prediction of A-level grades for those from less advantaged backgrounds, less familiarity with admissions processes (e.g. less advantaged students that do apply are more likely to apply to the most over-subscribed courses), applicant concerns that selective universities are socially exclusive and “not for the likes of them” and difficulties for those from less advantaged backgrounds in demonstrating their academic potential in the admissions process (e.g. knowledge of, preparation for and confidence in interviews, issues with UCAS personal statements or unconscious bias in the admissions process). Further research is required to explore the reasons for the existence of the fair access gap in more detail.
- Too many of the most selective universities are not setting ambitious enough targets to close this fair access gap. Even if every Russell Group institution meets the targets they have set themselves in their Access Agreements with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), it would only reduce the number of “missing” state-educated students by one quarter by 2016/17<sup>11</sup> (see Table 5 in Annex A).

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission is deeply concerned about the lack of progress on fair access. The most selective universities need to be doing far more to ensure that they are recruiting from the widest possible pool of talent. The Commission will be looking for evidence of a step change in both intention and action in the years to come.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Cook C. *School System Hinders University Access* Financial Times, 24 February 2012

<sup>10</sup> Boliver V. *How Fair is Access to More Prestigious UK Universities*, British Journal of Sociology 64:2 (2013)

<sup>11</sup> Data sourced from OFFA access agreements for 2013-14: see <http://www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/>



## **Responses to *University Challenge* – Summary of Key Messages**

*University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility*, looked in detail at what universities and others in the higher education sector were doing to support social mobility. The report made a number of recommendations for how universities could do more to ensure their doors are open to the widest possible pool of talent and how government policy should be changed to help them achieve these social mobility goals.

Key recommendations for universities included:

- making widening participation and fair access a top priority and setting clear statistical targets for the progress that will be made over the next five years;
- developing more concrete links with state schools, including through universities sponsoring Academies;
- ensuring a greater proportion of universities' social mobility expenditure is directed towards more effective outreach activities rather than bursaries and, in particular, fee waivers;
- making greater use of contextual data in university admissions processes;
- collectively committing to close the "fair access gap" at the most selective universities.

Key recommendations for Government included:

- making a long-term commitment to increase the proportion of national wealth from public and private sources directed to higher education;
- setting a clear five year ambition for every school to make progress in closing the educational attainment gap between less advantaged children and others;
- reforming the National Scholarship Programme, including ensuring potential students know what support they will get before applying to university and ending support for fee waivers in order to redirect it to more effective forms of support;
- taking action to defuse the "social mobility time bomb" of access to postgraduate study, including commissioning an independent report to consider proposals for a loan system for postgraduate study;
- increasing funding for careers advice, making clear the importance of face-to-face guidance from impartial accredited professionals and making the delivery of high quality careers advice by schools part of the Ofsted school inspections framework.

The full list of recommendations is reproduced in Annex B.

Many universities and their representative bodies have written to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission setting out their views on the issues raised in *University Challenge* and the action they are taking in response.

It is clear from the responses that have been received and the discussions that the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission has been having with the higher education sector that a lot of consideration has been given to the issues raised in the report and the recommendations that it made. Many universities have clearly stated their intention to do more to help create a Britain that is more socially mobile. It is very encouraging that most universities are taking their responsibilities seriously and see improving social mobility as an important priority at the heart of what they do.

***The Russell Group is passionately committed to ensuring entry to our universities is wide open to talented and able students from all backgrounds –***  
Russell Group

***Widening participation and fairer access are central to the University of Manchester's institutional values and core strategic goals –*** University of Manchester

***Universities are an important vehicle in supporting social mobility of those from less advantaged backgrounds –*** University of Nottingham

***At Aston University, we broadly welcome the thrust of your report and we share your passion for tackling inequalities and supporting upward mobility for all –***  
Aston University

***At the University of East Anglia we are proud of our drive to address (the issue of improving social mobility) by widening participation. The pursuit of social inclusion in the profile of the students we admit is one of the University's guiding precepts –*** University of East Anglia

The rest of this section provides an overview of the key messages from the responses received by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

### **Building links between universities and schools**

A key theme of *University Challenge* was that universities have a crucial role to play in helping close the gap in attainment between advantaged and disadvantaged students, raising the aspirations of less well-off students to progress to higher education and supporting them to realise their aspirations. The report called on universities to take a number of actions, including:

- making it an explicit objective for universities to help schools close attainment gaps;
- developing more concrete links with individual schools including through sponsoring Academies;
- shifting more resources into outreach activities and aligning their outreach programmes around those approaches shown to have most impact;
- considering using some of their outreach expenditure to develop a scheme to provide financial support to support promising students from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay in full-time education beyond the age of 16.

Most universities acknowledge the responsibilities they have for closing the attainment, aspiration and information gaps in schools. There is also evidence that many are taking concrete steps to build strong links with schools that will make a real difference. A growing number of universities in England are sponsoring Academies and developing partnerships with a wide range of schools within their local areas. Universities are also investing increasing resources in outreach activities and there is an increasing emphasis on evaluating outreach programmes to establish what works.

***Stronger partnerships with schools and colleges are essential to facilitate access to university from all sections of society –*** University of Sheffield

***(Our) emphasis is on longer-term and sustained outreach programmes that work with potential applicants over a number of years and the programmes generally start from Year 9 onwards –*** Liverpool John Moores University

***Several Russell Group universities sponsor Academies (and also) maintain a wide range of other forms of partnerships with schools, all of which focus on raising aspirations and improving attainment –*** Russell Group

***Raising both the aspirations and attainment of young people within the local area is a key element of the University's Widening Participation Strategy and commitments outlined within our access agreement –*** University of Bristol

Several responses highlighted the negative impact that the Government's decision to abolish the Aimhigher programme is having. They pointed to the growing difficulty universities face in effectively engaging with schools and coordinating and targeting their outreach efforts. Universities emphasised their commitment to continue to collaborate with other institutions and maintain the regional partnerships built up under the programme.

***We agree that closing the national Aimhigher programme was a mistake...the loss of the Aimhigher programme has left a real gap in schools irrespective of what the Higher Education sector can offer*** – Aston University

***Following the closure of Aimhigher, regional partnerships with schools in disadvantaged areas remain an important part of widening participation work and very many of our universities have retained these partnerships*** – Russell Group

***Brunel University regrets the demise of (Aimhigher) and the contribution it has made to aspiration in our local Borough and beyond*** – Brunel University

***The loss of Aimhigher funding for schools and colleges and also for Local Authorities has made the coordination of activity more difficult, specifically ensuring that the right pupils are targeted*** – Liverpool John Moores University

Many universities questioned whether there was a clear rationale for them to provide financial support to 16-19 year olds: both on a point of principle (there was a strong belief that providing financial support to post-16 students was not a role for universities) and as they believe there was no clear evidence base to support outreach funds being used in this way (several responses questioned whether it would be effective in achieving their widening participation objectives).

***Universities cannot be responsible for providing financial assistance to post-16 students*** – Russell Group

***We are not convinced that your proposal for universities to deliver 'EMA-style funding incentives' would be effective...EMA is not the right 'tool' to use to address the HE access question*** – Guild HE

### **Setting targets for fair access**

The report called on the higher education sector, through its various representative bodies, to set out a clear ambition, in the form of statistical targets, for the progress it will make over the next five years on both widening participation and fair access. It also called on the most selective universities collectively to commit to close the "Sutton Trust gap" – ensuring that the social background of their intake is representative of those who get the right A-level grades.

Representative bodies in the Higher Education Sector did not feel this would be a useful step for them to take, saying that it was difficult to aggregate the different targets that individual institutions set themselves. There was also a feeling among some highly selective institutions that the report overestimated the number of students who have the potential to succeed at the most selective universities.

***All our universities have set out their own plans and targets for their access work, to which they are fully committed, but as these plans and targets contain different measures of success, it would not be helpful or meaningful to aggregate them... There are many factors which affect access, most of which are beyond the control of any individual university or universities collectively, so it would not be appropriate or helpful for any representative body or bodies to set a collective target – Russell Group***

***We do not agree with the proposal that Universities UK, in partnership with other representative bodies, should establish statistical targets for widening participation over the next five years. Each university is best placed to determine what targets are appropriate based on their individual circumstances – Universities UK***

***We think it is very likely that the “missing 3,000” identified some years ago overstates the number of prospective candidates who realistically have the potential and interest to go to the most selective institutions. But that is not in any way to gainsay the objective, which we consider to be eminently worthwhile – University of Oxford***

### **Using contextual data during the admissions process**

*University Challenge* highlighted the large and growing body of evidence that suggests that students who attain a given set of A-level and GCSE results in more challenging educational and socio-economic contexts are more likely to achieve a first or upper second class degree than students from more advantaged backgrounds who have similar results. As universities have long acknowledged, focusing on prior attainment alone may not identify the best students with the most potential. There is now a clear evidence base that supports the use of contextual data.

The report called on universities to mainstream the use of contextual data: making it universal (including through making lower offers to students from less advantaged backgrounds where appropriate), using better data (to ensure the science underpinning contextual data is robust and its use is evidence-based) and sharing good practice (to support the effective use of contextual data and help address the challenges). Key recommendations included:

- that the various bodies representing universities agree a common statement of support for the appropriate use of contextual data (including through making lower offers where there is evidence to support it);
- that government and the higher education sector work together to unlock the necessary data and further develop the evidence base to inform the effective use of contextual data (with an agreed dataset in place for the 2014/15 admissions cycle);
- that the higher education sector collaborate to produce a definitive best practice guide about what works when it comes to contextual data.

There was widespread agreement with the report's recommendation that the use of contextual data during the admissions process should be mainstreamed. Most responses highlighted the many different ways that universities were utilising contextual data in their admissions processes. Many responses, however, noted that a key barrier to increased use of contextual data was the lack of access to national data: both to allow further research to develop the evidence base further and to allow universities to use contextual data in a more sophisticated way by providing a richer picture about the social background of applicants. Several responses noted that

these barriers reduced their confidence in using contextual data: for example, while most highly selective institutions were convinced by the research that high achievers from less advantaged backgrounds merited additional attention in their admissions process, some were not convinced that it would be appropriate to provide lower offers.

***The report was right to raise admissions as a critical issue. The University of Bristol is proud to have been the first university to take contextual data into account...it is hoped that your report will encourage a national debate on the use of contextual data and encourage a more standardised approach*** – University of Bristol

***We support the report's endorsement of the appropriate use of contextual data (but) without improvements being made to the data set provided to universities, the University would be unable to introduce additional enhancements to the way it uses contextual data*** – University of Sheffield

***We have pioneered the use of contextual data at Manchester...developing a better national evidence base and a greater and more robust range of indicators through the UCAS system would appear key to further its usage*** – University of Manchester

***We support the use of contextual data and have been using it in our undergraduate admissions for many years...we would welcome a common statement of support for the appropriate use of contextual data in university admissions and would offer the support required to develop an agreed dataset*** – University of Newcastle

***Universities UK supports the use of contextual data (and) has worked hard...to demystify why and how universities use contextual data but we do appreciate more work needs to be done. SPA's research to develop an evidence base on the use of contextual data will be important; Universities UK will be an active partner with SPA in taking this work forward*** – Universities UK

## Effectiveness of the National Scholarship Programme

*University Challenge* highlighted the need for a strategic review of government funding for access, including the National Scholarship Programme (NSP), to ensure that public resources were used to get the greatest social mobility impact. Concerns were raised that resources were not being directed to the most effective interventions or being targeted at those who need it most and also that the scheme was poorly understood and confusing to administer. The independent evaluation of the first year of the scheme echoed these findings, suggesting that it is having little impact on widening participation goals.

The report made a number of recommendations:

- NSP support for fee waivers should be ended (given that there is little clear evidence that they have a positive social mobility impact);
- resources need to be more targeted towards institutions with the most disadvantaged students;
- more needs to be done to increase awareness of the scheme and make eligibility for scholarships clear to students before they apply to university;
- the operation of the scheme needs to be simplified;
- there needs to be a strategic review of all access funding to ensure it is used strategically to have the greatest national impact: giving greater certainty and consistency, ensuring students know what financial support they could expect to receive before applying, giving greater incentives for universities to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds (perhaps through a Pupil Premium type arrangement) and giving universities the means to switch resources away from fee waivers towards outreach and other more effective activities.

Most university responses shared the concerns raised in the report about how effective the National Scholarship Programme was in achieving its social mobility goals. It is crucial that the National Strategy being developed by HEFCE and OFFA, due for publication in autumn 2013, addresses these issues.

***We agree that there are some significant issues with the design of National Scholarship Programme and could this funding be better used*** – Russell Group

***We share your concerns regarding the need to improve the effectiveness of the National Scholarship Programme and are involved directly in this as part of David Willett's NSP Steering Group*** – Universities UK

***We share your criticisms of the National Scholarship Programme...we continue to believe that there would be merits in deploying the resource on a national basis via means testing*** – Million Plus

***We support wholesale reform of the NSP. While reducing a fee level may be desirable for some students who are more debt averse, forcing them to receive support in a particular way goes against the principle of students making their own informed choices*** – University of Manchester

***We agree that the National Scholarship Programme is complicated and fee waivers are unattractive...it should be discontinued completely because of its complex and confusing structure, the fact that each institution has developed its own method of allocation and its distortion of eligibility for our wider core bursary package*** – University of Nottingham

***We believe the system of student support should be streamlined. In our view, the NSP is poorly targeted...the NSP system should be replaced by a means-tested entitlement to a national bursary programme*** – University of Huddersfield

***The University agrees with the reports' comments on the non-effectiveness of fee waivers*** – Brunel University

## The postgraduate funding system

*University Challenge* highlighted a number of concerns about access to postgraduate education, concluding that “there is a real risk that an individual’s ability to pay up front, rather than their potential, will become an increasing determining factor in who can access postgraduate education” and that “lack of access to postgraduate study is in danger of becoming a social mobility time bomb”.

The report made two key recommendations in this area:

- institutions should collect more data on the social background of applicants for postgraduate courses and the progression rates of different groups. The Government should establish a working group to advise on what additional information should be collected about postgraduates to inform future policy decisions on widening access to postgraduate study;
- the Government should commission an independent report, building on the principles of the Browne Review, to include consideration of proposals for a loan system for postgraduate students.

Responses to the report shared these concerns. Many felt that postgraduate study was not given the attention it merits in the Browne Review or in the 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*. There was widespread agreement about the need for action in this area.

There has been some action on the first recommendation: Universities UK highlighted the work it is doing with HEFCE and HESA to improve the evidence base and determining the type of information that needs to be collected to inform future policy decisions on postgraduate provision. Less positively, the Government appears to have decided against commissioning an independent report looking at the issue of postgraduate access. This is very disappointing.

***We are in very strong agreement that access to postgraduate study is often difficult for widening participation students and consequently this weakens the talent pool from which our professions can recruit*** – University of Sheffield

***The ability of students to pay their fees up front rather than their potential to succeed on the programme may increasingly determine who can access postgraduate education*** – Liverpool John Moores University

***The University wholeheartedly agrees with the suggestion of the introduction of a loan system to support postgraduate study. This may encourage those from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds to take part in postgraduate study*** – Brunel University

***We welcome the report’s highlighting of the issue of widening participation in postgraduate study. We think this is an area that requires greater efforts nationally, not least because of its importance for social mobility in respect of access to the HE academic profession. Diversifying the profile of academic staff in HE is, we believe, an important element in improving access, retention and success for students from under-represented groups*** – University of the Arts London

## **Conclusions and Next Steps**

Overall, the response of the higher education sector to *University Challenge* has been good. There is clear recognition of the 'access challenge', increasing determination to do something about it and clear evidence that the recommendations made in the report have been carefully considered by the sector.

The key challenge is in making sure that these good intentions translate into better outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. More needs to be done to be confident that the significant progress needed on this agenda will be made and, in particular, ensuring that the disappointing performance on improving access to the most selective universities over the past 10 years will not be repeated in the next decade. The statistics cited in this document illustrate the scale of the task facing the higher education sector in making a real difference to these outcomes.

There are a number of areas where more needs to be done including.

- **Setting clear statistical targets for improving fair access:** Despite the focus on fair access over the past decade, there has been little improvement in outcomes at many of our most selective institutions. The Commission believes it is essential that the Russell Group signals its determination to make a real difference to outcomes by setting a clear collective statistical target for how much progress its members are aiming to make in closing the 'fair access gap'. Not doing so risks a lack of sustained focus among the most selective universities;
- **Making more use of contextual data in the admissions process:** While progress is being made, there is much more to do to make the use of contextual data universal, ensuring that admissions processes are informed by the growing evidence base that students from less advantaged backgrounds tend to outperform other students with similar A-level grades on their degrees.
- **Taking urgent action to improve the effectiveness of the National Scholarship Programme:** The independent evaluation of the first year of the programme published in March 2013<sup>12</sup> suggested it is having little impact on widening participation goals – students don't know prior to applying whether they will receive any support and fee waivers are expected to have little impact. The Government must take urgent action to address these issues.
- **Setting up an independent review of the postgraduate funding system:** There is insufficient focus by Government on the issues raised in the report around access to postgraduate courses by those from less advantaged backgrounds. This was raised as a key issue by many responses to *University Challenge*. The Government should take heed.

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission will continue to monitor the progress universities are making in achieving their social mobility objectives and will work together with the higher education sector to help drive change.

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<sup>12</sup> Higher Education Funding Council for England, *Formative Evaluation of the National Scholarship Programme: Summary of Year 1 Findings Submitted to HEFCE by CFE and Edge Hill University*, Bowes, Thomas and Moreton, 2013



## Annex A

### **“Missing” state school students from Russell Group institutions**

The intake of most Russell Group universities is more socially advantaged than expected given the social background of those who have the A-level grades required to enter these institutions.

If all of the 20 Russell Group universities in England achieved their Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Widening Participation benchmarks, they would have recruited an additional 3,662 students from state schools: 78.3% would have been state educated rather than the actual 72.6%. To meet their benchmarks, they would, overall, need to increase their recruitment of students from state schools by 7.8%.

The HESA benchmarks are calculated by modelling how socially advantaged each university’s intake would be if their student recruitment was representative of all university entrants who had the A-level grades required to enter their courses.

Data comes from *Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the United Kingdom: Widening Participation of Under-Represented Groups Table 1b*, Higher Education Statistics Agency (2013). Similar analysis focusing on 13 selective universities in *The Missing 3,000: State Schools Under-Represented at the Leading Universities*, Sutton Trust (2004) <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/the-missing-3000/>.

*Table 2 – Number of “Missing” State Educated Students at Russell Group and “Sutton Trust 13” institutions*

Institutions	% State educated	Total state educated	Benchmark	“Missing” students	% increase in number of state students required to meet benchmark
Birmingham	76.1%	3,497	79.6%	161	4.6%
Bristol	59.9%	1,758	76.0%	473	26.9%
Cambridge	57.9%	1,534	71.4%	358	23.3%
Cardiff	83.0%	3,254	83.1%	4	0.1%
Durham	59.2%	1,749	75.1%	470	26.9%
Edinburgh	70.3%	2,004	77.9%	217	10.8%
Exeter	67.4%	2,194	76.2%	286	13.1%
Glasgow	87.8%	2,353	81.2%	-177	-7.5%
Imperial	62.7%	821	74.5%	155	18.8%
King’s	70.7%	1,598	78.3%	172	10.7%
Leeds	72.9%	4,268	80.8%	463	10.8%
Liverpool	87.6%	3,013	82.6%	-172	-5.7%
LSE	69.1%	473	71.2%	14	3.0%
Manchester	77.0%	4,120	80.0%	161	3.9%
Newcastle	69.2%	2,432	80.6%	401	16.5%
Nottingham	73.0%	3,913	79.6%	354	9.0%
Oxford	57.7%	1,552	71.2%	363	23.4%
Queen Mary’s	83.7%	2,005	82.6%	-26	-1.3%
Queen’s Belfast	97.6%	3,157	83.4%	-459	-14.5%
Sheffield	83.7%	3,444	80.0%	-152	-4.4%
Southampton	83.8%	3,008	80.9%	-104	-3.5%
UCL	64.7%	1,333	74.1%	194	14.5%
Warwick	73.3%	1,887	76.1%	72	3.8%
York	77.3%	2,168	78.1%	22	1.0%
<b>Russell Group</b>	<b>74.6%</b>	<b>57,537</b>	<b>78.9%</b>	<b>3,247</b>	<b>5.6%</b>
<b>Russell Group (England)</b>	<b>72.6%</b>	<b>46,769</b>	<b>78.3%</b>	<b>3,662</b>	<b>7.8%</b>
<i>St Andrews</i>	58.7%	519	72.7%	124	23.9%
<b>“Sutton Trust 13”</b>	<b>67.6%</b>	<b>23,210</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>2,976</b>	<b>12.8%</b>

*Table 3 – Number of “Missing” Students from Less Advantaged Social Backgrounds (NS-SEC 4-7) at Russell Group and “Sutton Trust 13” institutions*

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>% NS-SEC 4-7</b>	<b>Total NS-SEC 4-7</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>“Missing” students</b>	<b>% increase in number of students from NS-SEC 4-7 required to meet benchmark</b>
Birmingham	21.2%	974	21.9%	32	3.3%
Bristol	13.0%	382	19.3%	185	48.5%
Cambridge	10.3%	273	15.9%	148	54.4%
Cardiff	19.7%	772	24.4%	184	23.9%
Durham	13.5%	399	19.2%	168	42.2%
Edinburgh	16.5%	470	20.7%	120	25.5%
Exeter	15.2%	495	20.0%	156	31.6%
Glasgow	20.5%	549	22.5%	54	9.8%
Imperial	15.5%	203	17.1%	21	10.3%
King's	22.6%	511	21.5%	-25	-4.9%
Leeds	18.4%	1,077	22.7%	252	23.4%
Liverpool	22.0%	757	24.2%	76	10.0%
LSE	18.8%	129	17.0%	-12	-9.6%
Manchester	20.4%	1,091	22.4%	107	9.8%
Newcastle	19.5%	685	22.8%	116	16.9%
Nottingham	19.1%	1,024	22.5%	182	17.8%
Oxford	11.0%	296	16.0%	135	45.5%
Queen Mary's	32.4%	776	23.6%	-211	-27.2%
Queen's Belfast	31.4%	1,016	23.9%	-243	-23.9%
Sheffield	17.8%	732	22.1%	177	24.2%
Southampton	19.2%	689	22.7%	126	18.2%
UCL	16.3%	336	18.2%	39	11.7%
Warwick	18.6%	479	19.0%	10	2.2%
York	18.6%	522	21.3%	76	14.5%
<b>Russell Group</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>14,637</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>1,873</b>	<b>12.8%</b>
<b>Russell Group (England)</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>11,830</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>1,758</b>	<b>14.9%</b>
<i>St Andrews</i>	<i>13.0%</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>17.2%</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>32.3%</i>
<b>“Sutton Trust 13”</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>5,601</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>1,141</b>	<b>20.4%</b>

Note: The “Sutton Trust 13” most selective universities includes Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial, LSE, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, UCL, Warwick and York.

## Lower application and admission rates of students educated in state schools

Boliver (2013)<sup>13</sup> found that those educated in state schools were significantly less likely to apply to Russell Group universities than equivalently qualified privately educated students and – even if they applied – were significantly less likely to get in.

- **Application:** The research found that students from state schools “*seem to need to be better qualified than their private school counterparts on average by as much as two A-level grades before they are as likely to apply to Russell Group universities*”
- **Entry:** The research found that, even when students from state schools do apply to Russell Group institutions, “*they seem to need to be better qualified than their private school counterparts on average by as much as one grade at A-level before they are as likely to receive offers of admission*”

The research did not explore the reasons for the existence of this difference in application and entry rates.

Analysis of applicants to the University of Oxford in 2011 carried out by the Financial Times (2012)<sup>14</sup> also highlights the lower application and admission rates of highly qualified students from less advantaged backgrounds to the most selective institutions.

This analysis, comparing students from independent schools to students from the most disadvantaged state schools, found significant gaps at each of the three stages in the admissions process:

- Students from independent schools were almost seven times as likely to get very strong GCSE results;
- Students from independent schools with very strong GCSE results were 74% more likely to apply to Oxford (though there was only an ‘application gap’ between independent schools and the most disadvantaged schools);
- Students from independent schools with very strong GCSE results who applied to Oxford were over three times as likely to be successful in their application.

*Table 4 – Probabilities of a positive outcome at key stages in application to the University of Oxford*

	Independent schools	Most advantaged 10% of state schools	Mid-range 10% of state schools	Most disadvantaged 10% of state schools
Probability of getting very strong GCSE results	23.4%	7.1%	3.6%	3.4%
Oxford application <u>conditional</u> on very strong GCSE results	24.6%	28.5%	22.7%	14.1%
Acceptance <u>conditional</u> on very strong GCSE results and Oxford application	50.8%	42.5%	34.7%	15.1%
Total probability of a pupil getting a place at Oxford	2.93%	0.86%	0.28%	0.07%

<sup>13</sup> Boliver V. *How Fair is Access to More Prestigious UK Universities* British Journal of Sociology 64:2 (2013)

<sup>14</sup> Cook C. *School System Hinders University Access* Financial Times, 24 February 2012

## Limited ambition of many access agreement targets

Only seven of the 16 Russell Group universities in England who are not achieving their HESA benchmarks for state educated students have set themselves a specific target for closing the gap to their benchmark in their access agreements with OFFA.

Amongst those who have set a target, there is a wide variation in ambition: some, like University College London have set themselves an ambitious target to achieve their HESA benchmark by 2016/17. Others, including institutions a long way from achieving their HESA benchmarks, have set unambitious targets that will result in little change if they met them.

Overall, if every Russell Group institution in England met the targets to increase the proportion of entrants from state schools they have set themselves in their access agreements with OFFA, it would close a quarter of the current “fair access” gap. No collective targets have been set.

Data is taken from the HESA benchmarks cited above and from OFFA access agreements for 2013/14 <http://www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/>

*Table 5 – Access Agreement Targets on State Educated Students, Russell Group Universities in England*

Institutions	% State Educated	State Benchmark	2011/12 Gap	2016/17 Target	2016/17 Gap if hit target	% Gap closed
Birmingham	76.1%	79.6%	3.5%	None	3.5%	None
Bristol	59.9%	76.0%	16.1%	None	16.1%	None
Cambridge	57.9%	71.4%	13.5%	62.0%	9.4%	30%
Durham	59.2%	75.1%	15.9%	63.1%	12.0%	25%
Exeter	67.4%	76.2%	8.8%	72.0%	4.2%	52%
Imperial	62.7%	74.5%	11.8%	None	11.8%	None
King's	70.7%	78.3%	7.6%	77.5%	0.8%	90%
Leeds	72.9%	80.8%	7.9%	None	7.9%	None
Liverpool	87.6%	82.6%	None	86.4%	None	All
LSE	69.1%	71.2%	2.1%	72.0%	None	All
Manchester	77.0%	80.0%	3.0%	None	3.0%	None
Newcastle	69.2%	80.6%	11.4%	None	11.4%	None
Nottingham	73.0%	79.6%	6.6%	None	6.6%	None
Oxford	57.7%	71.2%	13.5%	None	13.5%	None
Queen Mary's	83.7%	82.6%	None	82.8%	None	All
Sheffield	83.7%	80.0%	None	85.7%	None	All
Southampton	83.8%	80.9%	None	84.6%	None	All
UCL	64.7%	74.1%	9.4%	75.3%	None	All
Warwick	73.3%	76.1%	2.8%	77.8%	None	All
York	77.3%	78.1%	0.8%	None	0.8%	None
<b>Russell Group (England)</b>	<b>72.6%</b>	<b>78.3%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>None (implied 74.1%)</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>25%</b>

## **Annex B – Recommendations in *University Challenge***

### **Chapter 2 - Access all Areas**

1. In this report we start from the assumption that bringing about improvements to both widening participation and fair access in higher education are important if social mobility is to improve. We urge universities to make it a top priority to deliver improvements in both fair access and widening participation.
2. We look to the sector and its various representative bodies to set out publicly a clear ambition –in the form of statistical targets – for the progress it will make over the next five years on both widening participation and fair access.
3. All of these efforts [around linking up HE datasets e.g. UCAS, HEFCE/HESA and the Social Mobility Transparency Board] need to be pooled in order that the new data-set can be in place for autumn 2013. The aim should be for data that is able to track the progress of people from particular backgrounds through school, into university, and then on into the workplace. The suggestion of developing a Unique Learner Number, which would act as a universal lifetime learner identified, analogous to the NHS number, is an idea that should be pursued.

### **Chapter 3 - Making the Grade**

4. The key is to ensure that the overall objective for schools is two-fold: to raise standards overall and at the same time to close the education attainment gap. These twin objectives should be the explicit driving intention behind all aspects of education policy. So the Government should set a five year ambition for each and every school to make progress on closing the attainment gap between its less well-off pupils and its better off pupils. Similarly, it should make the creation of individual free schools conditional upon increasing the proportion of their pupils, especially those from less well-off backgrounds, who get a place at a leading university. The new Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission should assess whether schools policy, across the waterfront, is both raising the bar and closing the gap.
5. The sector as a whole should partner with Teach First to provide funding, bursaries and in-kind support to help make these ambitions [to support Teach First in recruiting graduates] a reality.
6. Universities are, of course, autonomous organisations with the right to set their own agendas but it would be welcome if all universities felt able to make similar commitments [to social mobility via the work of their widening participation teams and mission statements]. After all, they are all subject to duties embedded in access agreement targets agreed with the Office for Fair Access to ensure they have as diverse a student body as is possible.

### **Chapter 4 - Getting ready – reaching out to potential applicants**

7. We recommend that any university that has not developed concrete links with individual schools should now do so. In particular, we urge more universities to follow the lead of those that have chosen to sponsor academies.
8. Universities, working with HEFCE and OFFA, should establish as a matter of urgency a collaborative research programme to establish which forms of outreach activity have the biggest impact of widening participation and fair

access. The results of that research should inform how universities deploy their access budgets. As part of this work, an agreed set of outreach objectives should be established. This should form the foundation of evaluation to enable comparison between programmes. It will be up to universities to decide which of the menu of objectives is their priority and how best to work towards it given their particular context. OFFA should require universities to demonstrate impact through this framework.

9. Universities should align their outreach programmes behind these approaches to ensure they have maximum social impact. In particular, universities should consider incentivising less advantaged school pupils to engage with programmes by:
  - Offering guaranteed interviews and, where appropriate, lower offers to pupils in schools that they support.
  - Offering guaranteed admissions interviews to those who successfully complete a university preparation programme, such as a summer school.
  - Recognising successful completion of such programmes with UCAS tariff points.
10. The Government should work with HEFCE, OFFA and higher education bodies to ensure that every school in the country has a relationship with an individual university or with one of these regional networks.
11. Every part of the country needs to be covered [by action to drive up outreach professionalism], and the existing regional forums need to come together in a national forum. The organisation that is best placed to drive forward a national programme of outreach activity – including the pooling of knowledge, research and evaluation of specific types of activity – is Universities UK. It should adopt a leadership role.
12. Universities should act to switch expenditure in this way (from bursaries and fee waivers towards outreach) and Offa should report on whether they are doing so.
13. Given the abolition of the EMA and the inadequacies of its replacement (see chapter 8), there is a good case for universities helping to provide financial support to promising disadvantaged pupils so they can achieve the necessary exam results to be able to successfully apply to higher education. The Russell Group and other higher education representative bodies should devise a scheme for doing so.
14. This system [the OFFA/HEFCE widening participation framework] needs to be rationalised. Universities should have one document which brings together all their work on effective participation, including outreach, admissions and retention. This will enable greater strategic focus, transparency and accountability. The process for making this happen has started but it needs to be resolved by the end of 2012.
15. More of this type of research [into good practice on access] needs to be undertaken by OFFA, and this guidance needs to play a stronger role in setting common standards for how universities direct their resources and evaluate their impact.

16. OFFA's mindset needs to change. It should analyse both the likely short- and long-term impact of the work universities are doing, and make a more holistic assessment of what progress is being made.
17. OFFA needs a graduated range of powers at its disposal. The Government's commitment to review the powers of OFFA based on the views of the new OFFA director is welcome, but that needs to happen in short order. OFFA needs to have new powers at its disposal by spring 2013 to inform its guidance on how to produce an access agreement for 2014-15.
18. A more nuanced and meaningful engagement between OFFA and universities requires better resourcing. That can be achieved by secondments into OFFA from universities and government departments and by sharing resources with HEFCE.
19. National Scholarship Support for fee waivers should cease.
20. The criteria for distributing the National Scholarship Programme needs to be adjusted to strike a better balance between incentivising those universities who have not made much progress on the widening participation agenda whilst not disadvantaging those who have done well.
21. All universities providing National Scholarship Programme support should make clear to potential students whether they will be eligible for financial support prior to their applications.
22. These anomalies [in the National Scholarship Programme scheme] need to be sorted out to simplify the operation of the NSP.
23. The Deputy Prime Minister has announced that the Government is conducting a review of how to maximise the impact of the NSP. We believe that this review should take a holistic look at the NSP and the HEFCE grant alongside the financial resources that universities commit through their access agreements with a view to meeting the three objectives above. The aim should be to find ways of pooling as many of these resources as possible and agreeing means of managing them strategically to have the greatest social mobility impact. The objective should be to put in place a national programme by autumn 2013.

## **Chapter 5 - Getting In – university admissions**

24. Every university should seek to do more to widen participation and make access fairer. Different universities, however, should be able to place different emphasis on the respective parts of this agenda.
25. The best safeguard against these concerns is for the sector as a whole to make contextual data as universal as possible. Ideally it should be used by all universities. To that end it would be helpful if the various bodies representing universities could agree a common statement of support for the appropriate use of contextual data.
26. The Government's Social Mobility Transparency Board should work with the higher education sector to help unlock the necessary data [to support contextual admissions]. It would be helpful if all universities could engage constructively with this process. The aim should be to have an agreed data set in place for the 2014-15 admissions cycle.

27. The sector should collaborate to produce a definitive best practice guide to what works when it comes to using contextual data.
28. It is important that all admissions processes, whether through UCAS or direct to the university, are based on the same principles: transparency, fairness, and holistic assessment. The sector needs to work collaboratively to ensure that this is the case.
29. The sector and the Government should share as much student data as possible (suitably anonymised) with existing organisations such as Which? and BestCourse4Me to encourage a market in comparable and accessible information about courses and universities. HEFCE as the student champion should ensure such information is equally accessible to disadvantaged students as to better-off ones.
30. Whatever the competencies a university is looking for, they need to assess the relative opportunities candidates had to develop them, and take steps to ensure that the assessment processes they use do not inadvertently create barriers which unnecessarily narrow their pool of successful applicants.
31. The Government should set itself a clear target for increasing the proportion of apprentices who enter higher education and universities should set out how they plan to accept more students who have completed apprenticeships on to their courses.
32. Action now needs to be taken to recognise and embed into the mainstream foundation year programmes more widely.
33. If a student completes a foundation year programme, it should enable them to access a similar degree at any university. We would therefore urge universities to consider successful completion of a foundation degree as a valid level of prior attainment.
34. A section of the UCAS website should be devoted to foundation programmes to enable a single point of comparison, and universities should adopt the same tools they use for the Key Information Sets for their foundation programmes.
35. Highly selective universities should put in place more foundation programmes.
36. Wherever somebody lives, they should be able to find a local further education institution that provides higher education. Together with government HEFCE should map what needs to be done to bring this about.
37. The sector should come together to agree how online learning can be developed to broaden the range of students who are able to benefit from higher education.
38. This report recommends that the most selective universities:
  - Collectively commit to close “the Sutton Trust gap” – the 3,000 or so state-educated children who have the grades but don’t get the places – at their institutions within the next 5 years.
  - Each agree to sponsor a City Academy school in a disadvantaged areas.
  - Take collective ownership of Teach First’s goal to increase its graduate intake from 772 in 2011 to 2,000 by 2015. The Russell Group of



universities should then consider how they can contribute to the further expansion of Teach First beyond 2015 so that its teacher numbers grow year-on-year with an ever-higher proportion of Teach First graduates coming from the most selective universities in the country.

- Each provide foundation degree opportunities targeted at those pupils in less-advantaged areas who have the greatest potential but lower grades than the current admissions entry criteria allow.

## **Chapter 6 - Staying in – Student Retention**

39. This type of evidence based intervention [to support student retention], taking account of the full student life cycle from first point of contact through to further study or the workplace, should become embedded in every institution.
40. Universities should consider what support they can provide to help particular groups of under-represented students succeed in completing their studies. This will require, in some cases, assessing what skills universities require students to have in advance and which ones they can develop after admission.
41. At present, approximately 60% of universities have student charters in place. We believe the remaining 40% would benefit from introducing them but their format and content should be a matter for individual institutions, in partnership with students and the student union, to determine.
42. The Hughes report recommended that Government should work with the sector to implement a system where all higher education institutions can recognise credit for coursework completed in a different higher education institution to allow students to transfer between institutions. We support this recommendation.
43. So far, a total of 75 higher education institutions have committed to implementing the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) and we would urge all institutions to follow their lead.
44. As a matter of priority, all universities, either individually or collectively, should subject their bursary schemes to proper evaluation to establish exactly how much financial support makes a difference to retention rates and amongst which groups.

## **Chapter 7 - Getting on – student outcomes**

45. These types of initiative [focusing on the development of skills and capabilities that employers value] are welcome, and we would urge more universities to follow their lead. Every university should develop a clear picture of the capabilities they aim to provide students.
46. There are many examples of universities which have rethought how they structure their careers services as they try to prioritise outcomes for their students...more universities should follow their lead.
47. At present, a small number of universities in the UK provide the majority of sandwich placements. More should do so.
48. We recommend that there should be a sector-wide agreement that no university will facilitate any exploitative work placements of any kind. Where universities

identify exceptional opportunities which are unpaid, universities should allocate a bursary fund and offer these opportunities via fair and open competition.

49. Both employers and universities have an interest in forming these kinds of partnerships [between employers and universities], and this should become the norm across the higher education sector.
50. As with their work on retention, universities need to do more to identify those groups who could benefit most [from extra-curricular opportunities at university] and find ways to help them take advantage of the opportunities on offer.
51. Employers have a crucial role to play in ensuring that ability and potential, not brand or status, becomes the determining factor in who they recruit. The top employers in particular need to broaden the range of universities from which they recruit.
52. One particular concern is the use of UCAS tariff points as a sifting criterion for access to graduate recruitment programmes. We would recommend that all employers stop this practice immediately as it is both discriminatory and unlikely to be effective as a tool for identifying potential.
53. League tables need to better reflect educational gain. They also need to reflect outcomes in terms of career paths that graduates achieve once they are in the labour market.
54. Given the power of league tables in shaping behaviour, we believe Government should take the lead in establishing new outcomes-focused league tables. They should be in place by autumn 2013.
55. Systematic data should be gathered by all institutions on both the social background of applicants for postgraduate courses and progression rates of different groups...Previous reports have suggested the Government establish a working group with the Higher Education Statistics Agency, higher education funding bodies, Universities UK and other stakeholders to advise on what additional information should be collected about postgraduates to inform future policy decisions on widening access to postgraduate study. We endorse this recommendation. It should report by spring 2013.
56. The Government should consider introducing a loan system for funding postgraduate students. To start this process, the Government should commission an independent report, building on the principles of the Browne review, to come up with proposals for a loan system for all postgraduate study.

## **Chapter 8 - How Government can help**

57. The Government should now review how it is communicating with potential applicants and their families. A sustained communications campaign is needed, with messages that are delivered in a joined-up manner, using existing networks, by those in the most credible positions with the target audience.
58. The Government's communication effort also needs to be broadened, particularly to part-time students.
59. The Government should work with key stakeholders from UUK, UCAS, the Student Loan Company, the All Age Careers Service and others to come up with

a new strategy for encouraging non-traditional students – especially mature and part-time students – into higher education. It should start this work immediately, with the aim of having an effective strategy in place for the 2013/14 recruitment process.

60. We recommend the Government reconsider the total allocation of resources directed towards higher education. Whatever the short-term pressures for public spending constraints might be, the Government should make a long-term commitment to increase the proportion of national wealth being invested in education overall with more public and private expenditure being directed into the higher education system
61. At this stage, should remain at AAB+ for at least two full admissions cycles. This will allow time for detailed, independent evaluation of the policy. If the evidence shows that the policy is having a regressive impact, it will need to be fundamentally rethought, to find alternative ways to free up student numbers. If, however, the concerns are not borne out by the evidence, then the threshold could be expanded to ABB+ or below.
62. The Commission on Social Mobility and Child Poverty should monitor the evidence on the EMA replacement closely as it becomes available, and in the meantime the Government should increase the funding level and refine the targeting. And, as recommended earlier, universities should consider providing EMA-style financial incentives for young people to stay on and succeed in schools.
63. The Government should provide this information [to provide guidance to schools to help them understand their careers advice duties] and support to schools as a matter of urgency and in particular it should emphasise the importance of face-to-face careers guidance delivered by impartial accredited professionals.
64. There needs to be an on-going evaluation of the careers approaches taken by schools, and this should form a new part of the school inspections carried out by Ofsted. The quality and effectiveness of careers advice should form part of each school report undertaken by Ofsted.