



Analysis of access and participation plan targets in relation to OfS key performance measures

This report is to be read alongside 'Transforming opportunity in higher education, an analysis of 2020-21 to 2024-25 access and participation plans' (OfS 2020.06)

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Publication date 29 January 2020

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Introduction

1. At the Office for Students (OfS) it is our ambition that all students from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in and progress from higher education, and to achieve equality of opportunity in respect of student outcomes within a generation.
2. To help make this happen, we have set ambitious and long-term targets for the higher education sector. These are to eliminate:
 - the gap in entry rates at high-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups
 - the gap in non-continuation between the most and least represented groups
 - the gap in degree outcomes between white and black students
 - the gap in degree outcomes between disabled and non-disabled students.
3. These long-term targets are reflected in our key performance measures (KPMs), which are our main tools for understanding whether our vision is being realised. They measure progress against specific aspects of our strategy that are particularly important to us.
4. Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. They include the provider's ambition for change, the targets it has set, the measures it will put in place to achieve that change, and the investment it will make to deliver the plan.
5. The content of access and participation plans will vary between providers. Each plan will be informed by the circumstances of the individual provider and the characteristics, needs and views of its current and potential students. The strategy a provider adopts and the targets it sets must be determined by its assessment of its performance in relation to access, success and progression for students from underrepresented groups. We expect access and participation plans to address the widest gaps a provider has identified in its assessment of performance. In addition, where relevant, providers are expected to take account of the access and participation national KPMs and associated targets set by the OfS.
6. We expect higher education providers to set year-on-year targets in their access and participation plans that work towards achieving their own long-term targets. Where appropriate we would like these to align with our KPMs, but we are unable to be prescriptive and ultimately it is up to providers to identify their own priorities. For each higher education provider, we assess the ambition of the year-on-year targets they have set up to 2024-25, and how likely or unlikely they are to make sufficient progress in reducing gaps in access, success and progression, in the context of each institution. We use the sector key performance measures to understand progress against specific aspects of our strategy.
7. However, assessing providers' access and participation plans at a provider level does not tell us about how likely the sector is to make sufficient progress in addressing the OfS long-term targets and broader objectives around equality.

8. In order to understand whether the targets that higher education providers set in their access and participation plans are sufficiently ambitious to affect an appropriate level of change in addressing OfS long-term targets at a sector level, we have undertaken an analysis of access and participation plans at this level.
9. Our analysis focused on the ambition and likely progress identified in providers' targets relating to four KPMs:
 - a. KPM2 – the gap in participation at high-tariff providers¹ between the most and least represented groups².
 - b. KPM3 – the gap in non-continuation between the most and least represented groups³.
 - c. KPM4 – the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2:1s) between white students and black students.
 - d. KPM5 – the gap in degree outcomes (1st or 2:1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students.
10. Most providers' access and participation plans refer to one or more of our KPMs in relation to their year-on-year targets. In our analysis we have attempted to identify which of these providers' targets contribute to the achievement of our KPMs. At a sector level, we can use these targets to help understand whether our vision for the sector is being realised.
11. In this report we set out our methodology for analysing the ambition of providers' access and participation plan targets and how we assessed their contribution to the achievement of our KPMs at a sector level.

Methodology

12. Our analysis focused on those 171 higher education providers with an approved access and participation plan as of 31 October 2019. This section sets out the methodology for our analysis.
13. We used textual analysis to identify targets in higher education providers' access and participation plans relating to OfS KPMs 2 to 5.
14. We used textual analysis to search for specific key words and phrases in providers' access and participation plans to identify relevant targets relating to KPMs 2 to 5. We used a variety of key words to enable us to differentiate between the four KPMs and assign a specific KPM to each target identified through this process.

¹ Higher education providers in the top third of the ranking by average tariff score. See OfS KPM2 for further details.

² Based on the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) classification, which groups areas across the UK based on the proportion of the 18- to 30-year-old population that participates in higher education, where quintile 1 is the least represented and quintile 5 the most represented group.

³ Again based on POLAR.

15. In addition, we undertook reviews to search for any additional relevant targets that the textual analysis failed to capture, for example because of spelling mistakes or omission of key words. We focused on those higher education providers where the textual analysis had not identified a target. Of these providers, we identified those that had a large gap in their access and participation plan student data, between the most and least represented groups (for KPM2 and 3), black and white students (for KPM4), or disabled and non-disabled students (for KPM5). We might reasonably have expected these providers to have set a relevant target to address these gaps. By reviewing these providers' targets, we were able to capture any that were relevant to our KPMs but that had not been identified through the textual analysis.
16. Table 1 shows the number of higher education providers with approved access and participation plans that our analysis identified as having targets relating to OfS KPMs 2 to 5. Our analysis may have missed a small number of providers' targets, but we believe that most targets have been captured in this way. The table also shows the number of providers with approved access and participation (A&P) plans where our analysis did not identify any targets relating to the OfS KPMs. The number of providers that we identified with targets relating to KPM2 appears low, but this is a consequence of the restriction of the KPM population to high-tariff providers.

Table 1: Number of providers with an approved A&P plan with and without targets relating to the OfS KPMs

	KPM2	KPM3	KPM4	KPM5
Number of providers with targets relating to KPMs in A&P plans	30	73	112	69
Number of providers with no targets relating to KPMs in A&P plans	1	98	59	102
Total	31	171	171	171

Note: The number of providers identified under KPM2 is small because of the restriction of the KPM population to high-tariff providers.

17. Having assigned providers' targets to KPMs we were also able to identify where particular targets were more complex, focusing on reducing gaps in participation, non-continuation or attainment for particular characteristics of students, including gender, age, different ethnicities, mode of study or level of study.

Selection of targets

18. Because some providers submitted multiple targets relating to each of the KPMs in their access and participation plans, for ease of interpretation we reduced these to the most relevant target per provider per KPM.
19. To help with the selection of targets, we classified the targets into those that referred to changes in gaps, ratios or proportions. We used textual analysis to identify relevant key terms and looked at whether the numerical targets increased or decreased over the five-year period, to identify which targets were likely to be expressed as:
- narrowing or closing a gap in participation, non-continuation or attainment

- increasing the proportion of participation, non-continuation, or attainment
- decreasing a ratio between different groups.

20. For each KPM, we identified the classification that the majority of targets used and favoured these targets over others. For KPM2, most of the targets referred to changes in ratios, therefore our analysis favoured targets based on ratios over targets based on proportions, then gaps and then other factors. For KPMs 3 to 5, our analysis favoured targets based on gaps.
21. To further reduce the targets and refine their relevance, we identified targets for all KPMs that related directly to the core student populations and the gaps focused on by each KPM. We favoured those higher education provider targets that discussed the populations and gaps identified in Table 2 over other targets.

Table 2: Core student population and gaps used in selection of targets for analysis

KPM	Core student population	Gap examined
2	English-domiciled 18- to 19-year-old entrants (all levels) to high-tariff providers in England	POLAR4 quintile1 vs quintile5
3	UK-domiciled 18- to 20-year-old entrants to full-time first-degree courses at providers in England	POLAR4 quintile 1 vs quintile5
4	UK-domiciled (all ages) graduating from full-time first-degree courses obtaining classified honours degrees, at providers in England	Black vs white students
5	UK-domiciled (all ages) graduating from full-time first-degree courses obtaining classified honours degrees, at providers in England	Disabled vs non-disabled students

Note: 'POLAR' = 'Participation of Local Areas'.

22. For KPM2, our eventual ambition is to eliminate the gap in 18- to 30-year-old participation at high-tariff providers between the most represented (Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4) quintile 5) and least represented (POLAR4 quintile 1) groups. However, since there is a time lag inherent in this measure (i.e. the behaviour of current 18-year-olds will continue to influence 18- to 30-year-old participation for the next 12 years), we have focused on a more immediate measure of our ambition: to eliminate the gap in **young** participation (18- to **20**-year-olds) at high-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups.

Calculating impact

23. In order to assess the potential impact of the targets at sector level, our analysis focused on those providers for which we had identified clear targets relating to OfS KPMs 2 to 5.

Contextualising targets

24. We needed to contextualise the targets set by each provider to ensure that we could apply them to a consistent student population across all of the providers used in our analysis. To do this, we decided to use the historical student data from 2016-17 (for KPM3) or 2017-18 (for KPMs 2, 4 and 5) from the published access and participation plan database.
25. Because KPM3 is based on the continuation of students into the second year of their course, we need data from the start of their second year to determine whether they have continued or

not. At the time of our analysis we did not have the 2018-19 student data available so were unable to use the 2017-18 student data from the published access and participation plan database in our analysis for this KPM.

26. However, not all the higher education providers for which we had identified relevant targets had historical data in the access and participation plan database or a student population of a sufficient size to be used in this analysis.
27. Table 3 shows the number of providers with an approved access and participation plan and historical student data that we were able to use in our analysis, separated out into those that had targets of relevance to the OfS KPMs and those that did not. The number of providers in the population for KPM2 is small because of the restriction of the KPM population to high-tariff providers.

Table 3: Number of providers with an approved access and participation plan, with or without historical student data, and with or without targets relating to OfS KPMs

	KPM2	KPM3	KPM4	KPM5
Providers with historical student data				
Number of providers with targets	30	62	96	62
Number of providers without targets	1	71	5	76
Total used in our analysis	31	133	101	138
Providers without relevant historical student data				
Number of providers with targets	0	11	16	7
Number of providers without targets	0	27	54	26
Total excluded from our analysis	0	38	70	33
Total number of providers with approved access and participation plans	31	171	171	171

28. Table 3 also shows the number of providers that we were unable to use in our analysis because they did not have historical data in the access and participation plan database relevant to these KPMs, or a student population of a sufficient size to use in our analysis. Most of these providers are small institutions or providers new to the sector. A relatively small number of these providers had set targets relating to the KPMs.
29. Having identified the providers that we could use in our analysis, we contextualised the targets that each provider had set for the five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25 by applying them to the historical student data from 2016-17 or 2017-18 (see paragraphs 24 and 25).
30. Contextualising the targets in this way gave us an indication of the year-on-year impact that providers' targets would have at a sector level on the relevant student populations for each KPM.

Recalculating the OfS KPMs

31. In order to assess the progress of the targets in relation to our KPMs we needed to compare the impact that the targets would have by the end of 2024-25 for each KPM – demonstrated by

the size of the gap in participation, non-continuation or attainment that remained at the end of five years – with the OfS KPM baseline position.

32. The published OfS KPMs, however, are calculated using different populations of students and providers from those available in the access and participation plan data used in our analysis.⁴ Therefore, to align the KPMs with the data used in our analysis we recalculated them restricting the population to the one for which we have historical access and participation plan data. This resulted in a revised KPM against which we could assess the progress relating to the application of providers’ targets. Table 4 shows the re-based KPMs.
33. The large difference between the original and re-based KPM2 shown in Table 4 is because the original KPM was based on 18- to 30-year-old entrants to high-tariff providers in England, whereas we have restricted our current analysis to young entrants, as explained in paragraph 25.

Table 4: Re-based OfS KPMs using access and participation plan data

	KPM2 (pp)	KPM2 (ratio)	KPM3 (pp)	KPM4 (pp)	KPM5 (pp)
Original KPM	19.8	4.81	4.4	23.1	2.8
Re-based KPM using restricted population	36.2	6.24	4.6	22.0	2.8

Note: ‘pp’ = ‘percentage point’.

34. Our findings about the progress of the targets by 2024-25 in relation to our KPMs are presented in paragraphs 46 to 72 of this report, identified as **Scenario 1** in Tables 5 to 8.

Assessing potential impact

35. To evaluate the potential impact of providers’ targets at the sector level, we undertook further analysis for KPMs 3 to 5 to identify what would happen to the gaps in participation, non-continuation and attainment if all providers that had set targets in their access and participation plans aimed to close the gaps to zero by 2024-25. We did this by recalibrating the 2024-25 percentage point gap to zero for each target and applied this to providers’ historical student data. Our findings are presented in paragraphs 46 to 72 of this report, identified as **Scenario 2** in Tables 6 to 8.
36. To provide us with an indication of the scale of work still to be done in the sector to close the gaps for KPMs 3 to 5, we extended our analysis to also examine the potential impact of all providers with approved access and participation plans closing the residual gaps to zero by

⁴ KPM2: English-domiciled 18- to 30-year-old entrants (all levels) to high-tariff providers in England.

KPM3: UK-domiciled 18- to 30-year-old entrants to full-time first degree courses at providers in England.

KPM4: UK-domiciled (all ages) graduating from full-time first degree courses obtaining classified honours degrees, at providers in England.

KPM5: UK-domiciled (all ages) graduating from full-time first degree courses obtaining classified honours degrees, at providers in England.

2024-25. Our findings are presented in paragraphs 46 to 72 of this report, identified as **Scenario 3** in Tables 6 to 8.

Unexplained gaps for KPMs 3 and 4

37. For KPMs 3 and 4 there are persistent gaps in non-continuation and degree attainment between different groups of students at a sector level. Some of the factors that contribute to these sector-wide gaps are due to the way in which students are distributed either:
- **within** student groups at higher education providers (such as by entry qualification, subject of study, age of students)
 - **across** the sector (how student groups are distributed between providers).
38. These observed distributional issues at either a provider or sector level are sometimes referred to as **structural factors**. However, once we have taken account of the structural factors, significant unexplained differences remain, which we refer to as the **unexplained gap**.
39. In setting targets to reduce gaps between student groups, higher education providers will have been mindful of both the structural and unexplained gaps in their own institution. The analysis presented here does not seek to, or need to, identify how much of the provider gap is associated with each of these elements. It is solely focused on the resulting absolute gap seen at each provider in 2024-25.
40. Although an individual provider cannot be solely responsible for affecting how student groups are distributed across the sector, it can help to reduce the impact of these distributions by improving the outcomes for all its own students. If particular student groups are concentrated in parts of the sector that generally have lower outcomes (regardless of student group), improving the outcomes in these parts of the sector will contribute to reducing the sector-wide gap between particular student groups. For example, if quintile 1 students disproportionately study at higher education providers with low continuation rates, closing the gap between quintile 1 and 5 students at these providers will still result in an overall gap in the continuation rate at sector level.
41. This highlights the need for additional incentives and support for universities and colleges to enable further and faster progress on closing the gaps. This may be achieved through other regulatory interventions such as the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework and regulatory framework for higher education in England conditions on quality and standards (B conditions), through strategic and targeted use of OfS funding, or by sharing information on effective practice through routes such as the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education.
42. In our analysis we have sought to identify how much of the sector-wide gap:
- higher education providers can influence at a sector level by addressing structural and unexplained factors **within** their institution
 - can be reduced by improving outcomes for all students in particular parts of the sector (or particular providers) and reducing the differences in how student groups are distributed **across** the sector and between providers.

Assumptions

43. We made a number of assumptions about the five-year period from 2020-21 to 2024-25 in our analysis. For KPMs 3 to 5, when applying the targets to the historical student data, we assumed that the size of the student population will remain constant. For KPM2, for projection purposes, the size of the population is assumed to grow only by the numerical increase in the POLAR4 quintile 1 entrants. We also assumed that the targets in provider's access and participation plans will be fully met year-on-year.

44. We also made a number of assumptions specific to particular KPMs:

- KPM2 – the number of quintile 5 entrants remains the same
- KPM3 – the proportion of quintile 5 students not continuing in higher education remains the same
- KPM4 – the proportion of white students gaining 2:1s or 1sts remains the same
- KPM5 – the proportion of non-disabled students gaining 2:1s or 1sts remains the same.

45. Further details about the assumptions we made in our analysis are provided at the end of this report.

Findings

46. This section discusses the findings from our analysis, looking at each KPM separately.

KPM2: The gap in participation at high-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups

47. Table 5 shows the different participation rates for POLAR4 quintile 1 students at the sector level, and the residual gap in 2024-25 for Scenarios 1 and 2 used in our analysis. KPM2 is displayed as both a percentage point gap and a ratio. A ratio expresses the chances of something occurring in one group compared with another. In this case it is the likelihood of quintile 5 students entering higher education at a high-tariff provider compared with quintile 1 students.

48. The table shows the re-based KPM of 36.2 percentage points' gap in participation between the most and least represented groups and a ratio of 6.24, using the 2017-18 historical baseline data for high-tariff providers with approved access and participation plans and available historical data (31 providers). The ratio of 6.24 for 2017-18 means that quintile 5 students are 6.24 times more likely to enter higher education at a high-tariff provider than quintile 1 students.

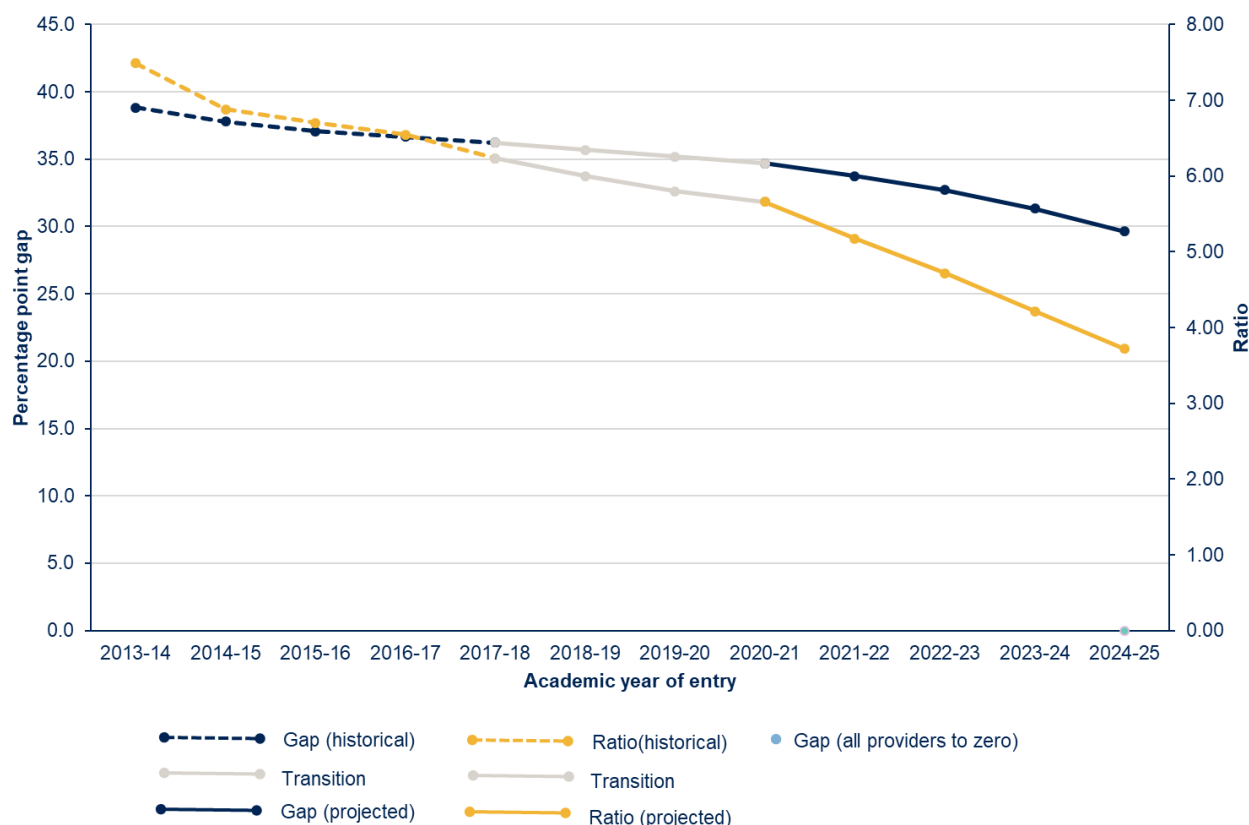
Table 5: KPM2 participation rate, remaining gap and ratio between POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 5 entrants in 2024-25 for high-tariff providers for different scenarios

Scenario	Proportion of entrants from POLAR4 quintile 1 areas (per cent) in 2024-25	Remaining gap (pp)	Ratio
Re-based KPM2 and ratio using the historical baseline (2017-18) for high-tariff providers with approved A&P plans	6.9	36.2	6.24
Scenario 1: If all targets identified in A&P plans are met by 2024-25	10.9	29.7	3.72
Scenario 2: If all targets identified in A&P plans are met and high-tariff providers without a target reduce their ratio to the same as the provider with the lowest ratio in 2024-25	11.5	28.8	3.50

Notes: Assumption that the number of entrants from POLAR4 quintile 5 areas in 2024-25 remains the same in all scenarios. Any differences in remaining gap are due to rounding.

49. Figure 1 shows the projected year-on-year gap in participation rates between POLAR4 quintile 1 and 5 entrants for Scenario 1. It also shows the historical trajectory for the same population of providers between 2012-13 and 2017-18, to provide additional context when assessing the relative ambition of the targets.

Figure 1: Historical and projected gap and ratio for access to high-tariff providers between POLAR4 quintile 1 and 5 entrants (KPM2)



50. Table 5 and Figure 1 show that if all providers achieved their targets by 2024-25, the sector gap will have reduced from 36.2 percentage points to 29.7 percentage points. We have assumed that the number of quintile 5 entrants will remain constant, and so closing the gap will have been achieved by increasing the proportion of quintile 1 entrants from 6.9 per cent to 10.9 per cent.
51. Assuming a small growth in the size of the quintile 1 population and no change in the rest of the sector, this would represent an increase of around 6,500 quintile 1 entrants admitted to high-tariff providers in the 2024-25 cohort compared with 2017-18. If we compare this with the historical trajectory shown in Figure 1, the targets appear to continue to reduce the slowly decreasing gap in access to high-tariff providers between quintile 1 and 5 students.
52. We have also modelled the longer-term trajectory based on the current rate of progress. This suggests that the ratio will be much closer to 1:1 by 2038.

KPM3: The gap in non-continuation between the most and least represented groups

53. Table 6 shows the different continuation rates for POLAR4 quintile 1 students at the sector level, and the residual gap at 2024-25, for each of the scenarios used in our analysis. The table shows the re-based KPM of 4.6 percentage points using the 2016-17 historical baseline data for providers with approved access and participation plans and available historical data (133 providers).

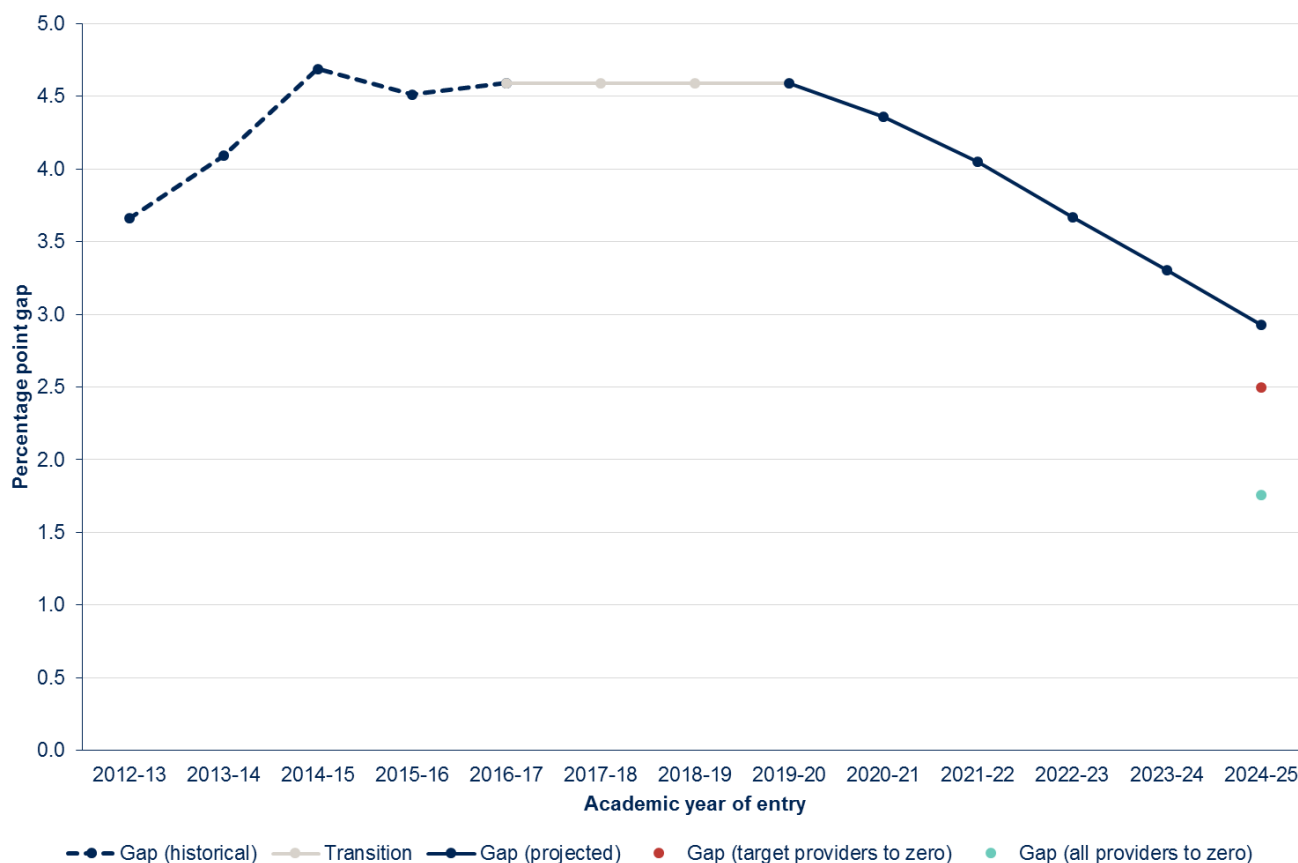
Table 6: KPM3 continuation rate and remaining gap between POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 5 students in 2024-25 for different scenarios

Scenario	POLAR4 quintile 1 continuation rate (per cent) in 2024-25	Remaining gap (pp)
Re-based KPM3 using the historical baseline (2016-17) for providers with approved A&P plans	90.2	4.6
Scenario 1: If all targets identified in A&P plans are met by 2024-25	91.8	2.9
Scenario 2: If all targets in A&P plans aimed to close the higher education provider gap by 2024-25	92.2	2.5
Scenario 3: If all higher education providers with approved A&P plans (regardless of whether they have set a target) closed the gap by 2024-25	93.0	1.8

Notes: Assumption that POLAR4 quintile 5 remains the same (94.7 per cent) in all scenarios. Any differences in remaining gap are due to rounding.

54. Figure 2 shows the projected year-on-year gap in continuation rates between POLAR4 quintile 1 and 5 students for Scenario 1 and the gaps that remain for Scenarios 2 and 3. It also shows the historical trajectory for the same population of providers between 2012-13 and 2016-17, to provide additional context when assessing the relative ambition of the targets.

Figure 2: Historical and projected gap in non-continuation between POLAR4 quintile 1 and 5 students (KPM3)



55. Table 6 and Figure 2 show that if all 62 providers that set targets relating to KPM3 in their access and participation plans, and for which we have historical data, met their targets by 2024-25 (Scenario 1), the residual gap in continuation rates between the most and least represented groups at a sector level would decrease from 4.6 percentage points (KPM baseline rate) to 2.9 percentage points in 2024-25. We have assumed that the proportion of quintile 5 students will remain constant, and so closing the gap will have been achieved by increasing the continuation rate of quintile 1 students from 90.2 per cent to 91.8 per cent. If we compare this with the historical trajectory shown in Figure 2, the targets appear to reverse the steadily increasing gap seen between 2012-13 and 2016-17, with the gap in continuation rates returning to 2012-13 levels by 2022-23 if all targets are met, reducing further by 2024-25. Assuming no change in the size of the sector, these projections represent an additional 500 quintile 1 entrants continuing in the 2024-25 cohort compared with 2016-17 levels.

56. Table 6 and Figure 2 also show that a residual gap of 2.5 percentage points would remain between POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 5 in 2024-25 if all 62 providers with targets relating to KPM3 in their access and participation plans close the continuation gap between the most and least represented groups to zero by 2024-25 (Scenario 2).

57. The difference between the residual gaps of 2.9 percentage points and 2.5 percentage points gives an indication of the distance between the sector-level gaps resulting from the targets set out in providers' access and participation plans and those resulting from closing these providers' gaps to zero.

58. Table 6 and Figure 2 also show that a residual gap of 1.8 percentage points in continuation rates between POLAR4 quintile 1 and 5 would still remain by 2024-25 if all 133 higher education providers with approved access and participation plans and historical data were to close the gap in continuation rates to zero by 2024-25 (Scenario 3). The fact that this gap is not zero is a result of how POLAR4 quintile 1 and quintile 5 students are distributed across higher education providers in the sector (structural differences in the student populations), and the variation in underlying continuation rates of higher education providers.

59. If the current rate of progress is maintained longer-term, it is projected that the continuation gap will not close until the mid-2030s.

KPM4: The gap in degree outcomes (1sts and 2:1s) between white and black students.

60. Table 7 shows the different attainment rates for black students at the sector level and the residual gap at 2024-25 for each of the scenarios used in our analysis. The table shows the re-based KPM of 22.0 percentage points using the 2017-18 historical baseline data for providers with approved access and participation plans and available historical data (101 providers).

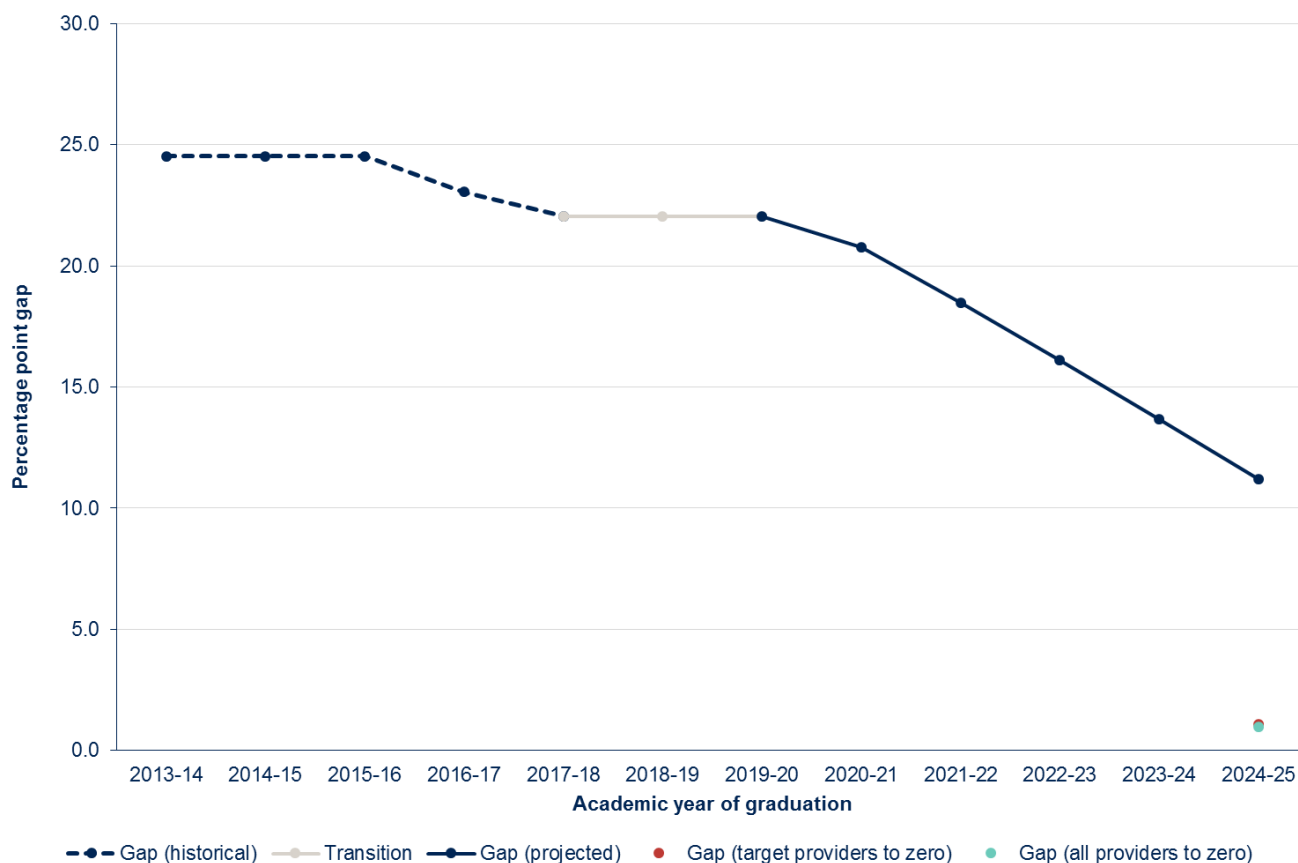
Table 7: KPM4 gap in degree outcomes between black and white students in 2024-25 for different scenarios

Scenario	Black students' attainment rate (per cent) in 2024-25	Remaining gap (pp)
Re-based KPM4 using the historical baseline (2017-18) for providers with approved A&P plans	61.0	22.0
Scenario 1: If all targets identified in A&P plans are met by 2024-25	71.9	11.2
Scenario 2: If all targets in A&P plans aimed to close the higher education provider gap by 2024-25	82.0	1.1
Scenario 3: If all higher education providers with approved A&P plans (regardless of whether they have set a target) closed the gap by 2024-25	82.1	1.0

Notes: Assumption that attainment rate for white students remains the same (83.1 per cent) in all scenarios. Any differences in remaining gap are due to rounding.

61. Figure 3 shows the projected year-on-year gap in attainment rates between black and white students for Scenario 1 and the residual gaps for Scenarios 2 and 3. It also shows the historical trajectory for the same population of providers between 2012-13 and 2017-18, to provide additional context when assessing the relative ambition of the targets.

Figure 3: Historical and projected gap in degree outcomes (1sts and 2:1s) between white and black students (KPM4)



62. Table 7 and Figure 3 show that if all 96 providers that set targets relating to KPM4 in their access and participation plans, and for which we have historical data, met their targets by 2024-25 (Scenario 1), the remaining gap in attainment rates between black and white students at a sector level would decrease from 22.0 percentage points (KPM baseline rate) to 11.2 percentage points in 2024-25. We have assumed that the proportion of white students will remain constant, and so closing the gap will have been achieved by increasing the attainment rate of black students from 61.0 per cent to 71.9 per cent. Assuming no change in the size of the graduating cohorts, these projections represent an additional 1,900 black students being awarded a 1st or 2:1 in the 2024-25 cohort compared with 2017-18 levels. If we compare this with the historical trajectory shown in Figure 3, the targets appear to continue to reduce the steadily decreasing gap seen between 2015-16 and 2017-18.

63. Table 7 and Figure 3 also show that a residual gap of 1.1 percentage points would remain between black and white students in 2024-25 if all 96 providers with targets relating to KPM4 in their access and participation plans close the attainment gap between black and white students to zero by 2024-25 (Scenario 2).

64. The difference between the residual gaps of 11.2 percentage points and 1.1 percentage points gives an indication of the distance between the sector-level gaps resulting from the targets set in providers' access and participation plans and those resulting from closing these providers' gaps to zero.

65. Table 7 and Figure 3 also show that a residual gap in attainment rates between black and white students of 1.0 percentage points would still remain by 2024-25 if all 101 higher education providers with approved access and participation plans and historical data were to close the gap in attainment rates to zero by 2024-25 (Scenario 3). The fact that this gap is not zero is a result of how black and white students are distributed across higher education providers in the sector (structural differences in the student populations) and of student attainment rates at different higher education providers. For example, if black students disproportionately study at higher education providers with low attainment rates, closing the gap between black and white students at these providers will still result in an overall gap in the attainment rate at sector level.

66. If the current rate of progress is maintained in the longer term, it is likely that there will be equality in award rates between the two groups by around 2030.

KPM5: The gap in degree outcomes (1sts and 2:1s) between disabled and non-disabled students

67. Table 8 shows the different attainment rates for disabled and non-disabled students at the sector level and the residual gap at 2024-25 for each of the scenarios used in our analysis. The table shows the recalculated KPM of 2.8 percentage points using the 2017-18 historical baseline data for providers with approved access and participation plans and available historical data (138 providers). The KPM shows a small residual gap at the sector level.

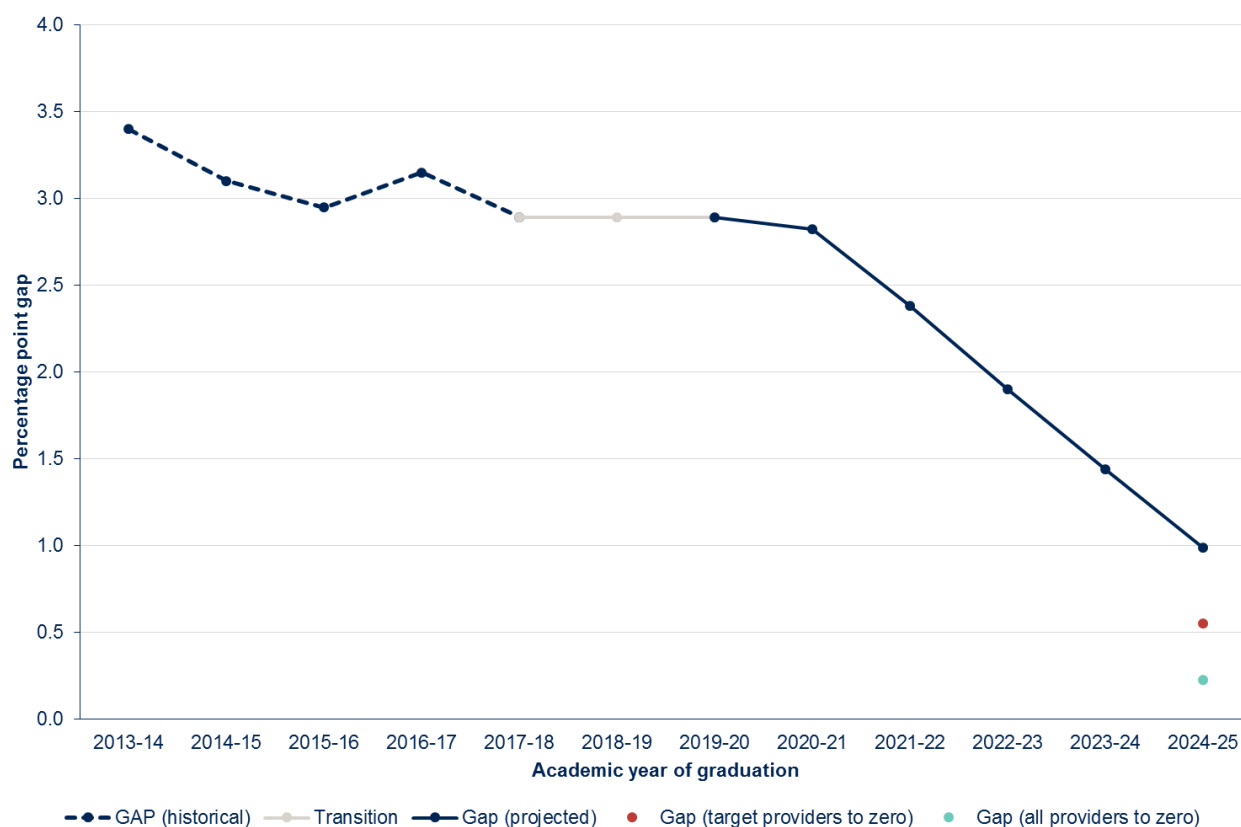
Table 8: KPM5 gap in degree outcomes between disabled and non-disabled students in 2024-25 for different scenarios

Scenario	Disabled students' attainment rate (per cent) in 2024-25	Remaining gap (pp)
Re-based KPM5 using the historical baseline (2017-18) for providers with approved A&P plans	76.6	2.8
Scenario 1: If all targets identified in A&P plans are met by 2024-25	78.4	1.0
Scenario 2: If all targets in A&P plans aimed to close the higher education provider gap by 2024-25	78.9	0.6
Scenario 3: If all higher education providers with approved A&P plans (regardless of whether they have set a target) closed the gap by 2024-25	79.2	0.2

Notes: Assumption that attainment rate for non-disabled students remains the same (79.4 per cent) in all scenarios. Any differences in remaining gap are due to rounding.

68. Figure 4 shows the projected year-on-year gap in attainment rates between disabled and non-disabled students for Scenario 1 and the residual gaps for Scenarios 2 and 3. It also shows the historical trajectory for the same population of providers between 2012-13 and 2017-18, to provide additional context when assessing the relative ambition of the targets.

Figure 4: Historical and projected gap in degree outcomes (1sts and 2:1s) between disabled and non-disabled students (KPM5)



69. Table 8 and Figure 4 show that if all 62 providers that set targets relating to KPM5 in their access and participation plans, and for which we have historical data, met their targets by 2024-25 (Scenario 1), the remaining gap in attainment rates between disabled and non-disabled students at a sector level would decrease from 2.8 percentage points (KPM baseline rate) to 1.0 percentage points in 2024-25. We have assumed that the proportion of non-disabled students will remain constant, and so closing the gap will have been achieved by increasing the attainment rate of disabled students from 76.6 per cent to 78.4 per cent. Assuming no change in the size of the graduating cohorts, these projections represent an additional 750 disabled students being awarded a 1st or 2:1 in the 2024-25 cohort compared with 2017-18 levels. If we compare this with the historical trajectory shown in Figure 4, the targets appear to continue to reduce the steadily decreasing gap seen between 2013-14 and 2017-18.

70. Table 8 and Figure 4 also show that a residual gap of 0.6 percentage points would remain between disabled and non-disabled students in 2024-25 if all 62 providers with targets relating to KPM5 in their access and participation plans close the attainment gap between disabled and non-disabled students to zero by 2024-25 (Scenario 2).

71. The difference between the residual gaps of 1.0 percentage points and 0.6 percentage points gives an indication of the distance between the sector-level gaps resulting from the targets set in providers' access and participation plans and those resulting from closing these providers' gaps to zero.

72. Table 8 also shows that a residual gap in attainment rates between disabled and non-disabled students of 0.2 percentage points would remain by 2024-25 if all 138 higher education providers with approved access and participation plans and historical data were to close the gap in attainment rates to zero by 2024-25 (Scenario 3). The fact that this gap is close to zero suggests that the way in which disabled students are distributed across higher education providers in the sector does not make a large contribution to the observed sector-wide gap.

Annex A: Technical annex

Assumptions

1. We made several assumptions about the five-year period from 2020-21 to 2024-25 in our analysis.

All KPMs

2. For all key performance measures (KPMs) examined, we assumed that the targets in providers' access and participation plans are fully met year-on-year between 2020-21 and 2024-25.
3. To help classify a higher education provider target, we have generally assumed that if numeric values appeared to increase year on year, this indicated an increase in participation, retention or attainment rates for the lower performing group of students. Where numeric values appeared to decrease year on year, we assumed this indicated a closing of the gap in participation, retention or attainment rates, or a decrease in the relative ratio, between different groups of students.

KPM2

4. For KPM2, we assumed that the number of entrants from POLAR4 quintile 5 areas would remain the same year on year using the historical 2017-18 data as a baseline, and that the number of entrants from quintile 1 areas would change. For projection purposes, the size of the population grows only by the numerical increase in the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) quintile 1 students.
5. Some targets related to multiple POLAR4 quintiles – for example, closing the gap in participation between quintiles 1 and 2 and quintiles 3, 4 and 5. In these cases we scaled the reported gap in participation to the one seen between quintile 1 and quintile 5 in the historical data for 2017-18, as we were only interested in the difference between the most and least represented quintiles, rather than what might happen to the gap between quintiles 2 and 3.

KPM3

6. For KPMs 3 to 5, when applying the targets to the historical student data, we assumed that the student population remains constant.
7. We assumed that the continuation rate of students from POLAR4 quintile 5 areas would remain the same year on year using the historical 2016-17 data as a baseline, and that only the quintile 1 continuation rate would change. In reality this might not strictly be the case – higher education providers may be working towards improving the continuation rate for all students, including those in quintile 5 – but the assumption provides us with a reasonable baseline to observe what might happen to the gap in continuation rates between quintile 1 and quintile 5 students.
8. Some targets related to multiple quintiles – for example closing the gap in non-continuation between quintiles 1 and 2 and quintiles 3, 4 and 5. In these cases we scaled the reported gap in continuation rates to the one seen between quintiles 1 and 5 in the historical data for 2016-17, as we were only interested in the difference between the most and least represented quintiles, rather than what might happen to the gap between quintiles 2 and 3.

KPM4

9. We assumed that the proportion of white students gaining 2:1s or 1sts would remain the same year-on-year using the historical 2017-18 data as a baseline, and that only the attainment rate of black students would change.
10. Some targets related to multiple ethnic groups – for example closing the gap in degree attainment between black and minority ethnic students and white students. In these cases, we scaled the reported gap in degree attainment rates to the one seen between black students and white students in the historical data for 2017-18.

KPM5

11. We assumed that the proportion of non-disabled students gaining 2:1s or 1sts would remain the same year-on-year using the historical 2017-18 data as a baseline, and that only the attainment rate of disabled students would change.



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