

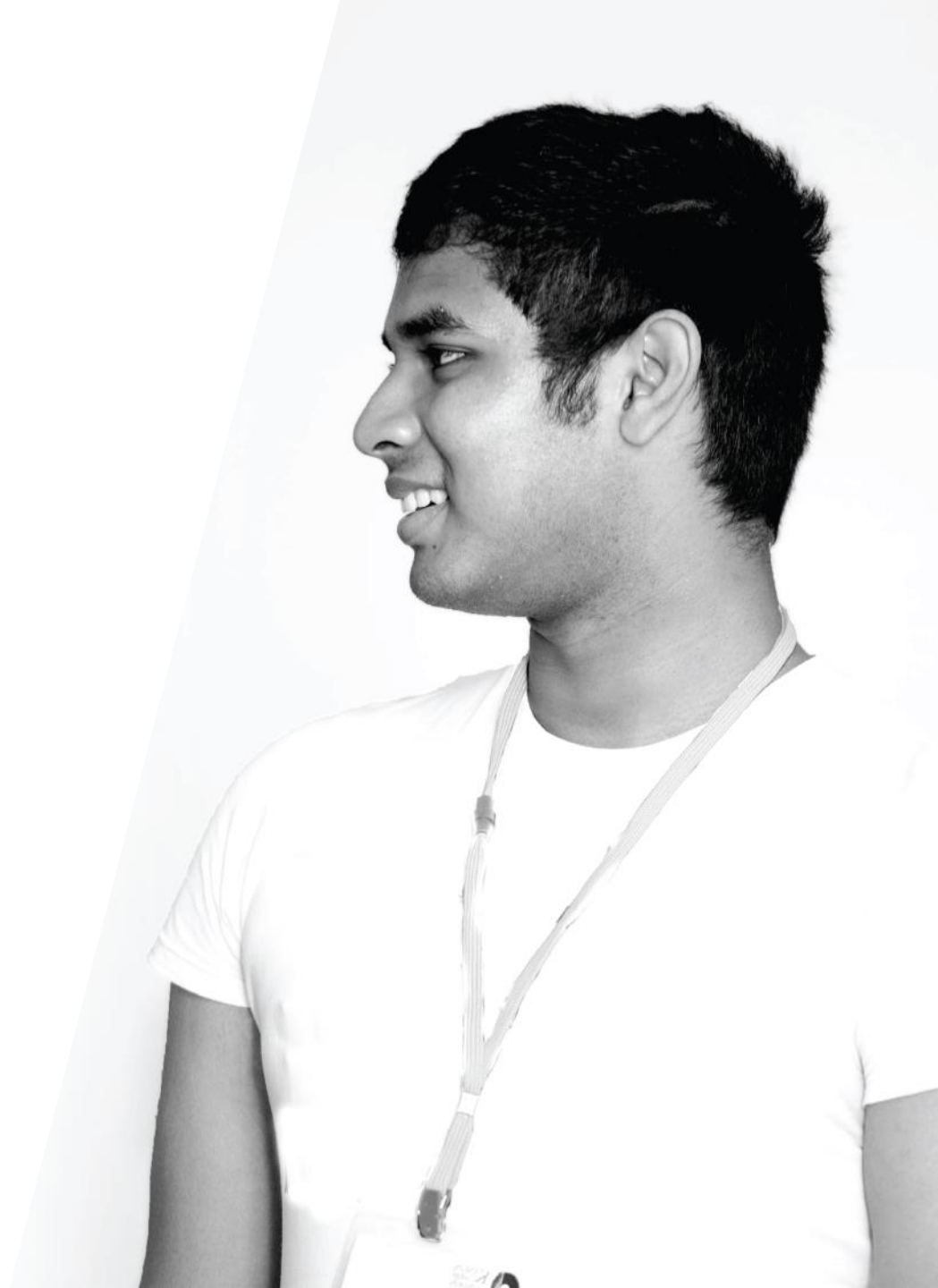
# Supporting disadvantaged learners to progress to university

Paul Martin, Advancing Access Project Manager



# Coming up...

- Widening Participation in Higher Education
- 'Nudge' your students towards aspirational choices
- Understanding contextual admissions processes



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Cardiff University / Durham University / University of Edinburgh  
University of Exeter / University of Glasgow / Imperial College London  
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University of Sheffield / University of Southampton / University College  
London University of Warwick / University of York



# Widening Participation in Higher Education

# Are we making progress on WP or not?

## Poor pupils still denied chance to get a degree

Nicola Woolcock,  
Education Correspondent

February 8 2019, 12:01am,  
The Times

Schools

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Universities

Music



The proportion of poorer and state school pupils attending university has not changed much in the past four years  
ALAMY

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# Are we making progress on WP or not?



PROFESSIONAL JOBS SUMMITS RANKINGS STUDENT AB



## More young disadvantaged students from England apply for university

Ucas releases figures on deprivation for the first time alongside 30 June deadline statistics

July 11, 2019

By [Anna McKie](#) Twitter: [@annamckie](#)

Applications to UK universities from young people in the most deprived areas of England have risen by 6 per cent on the previous year, while the number from the most advantaged areas has dropped by 1 per cent, Ucas figures show.

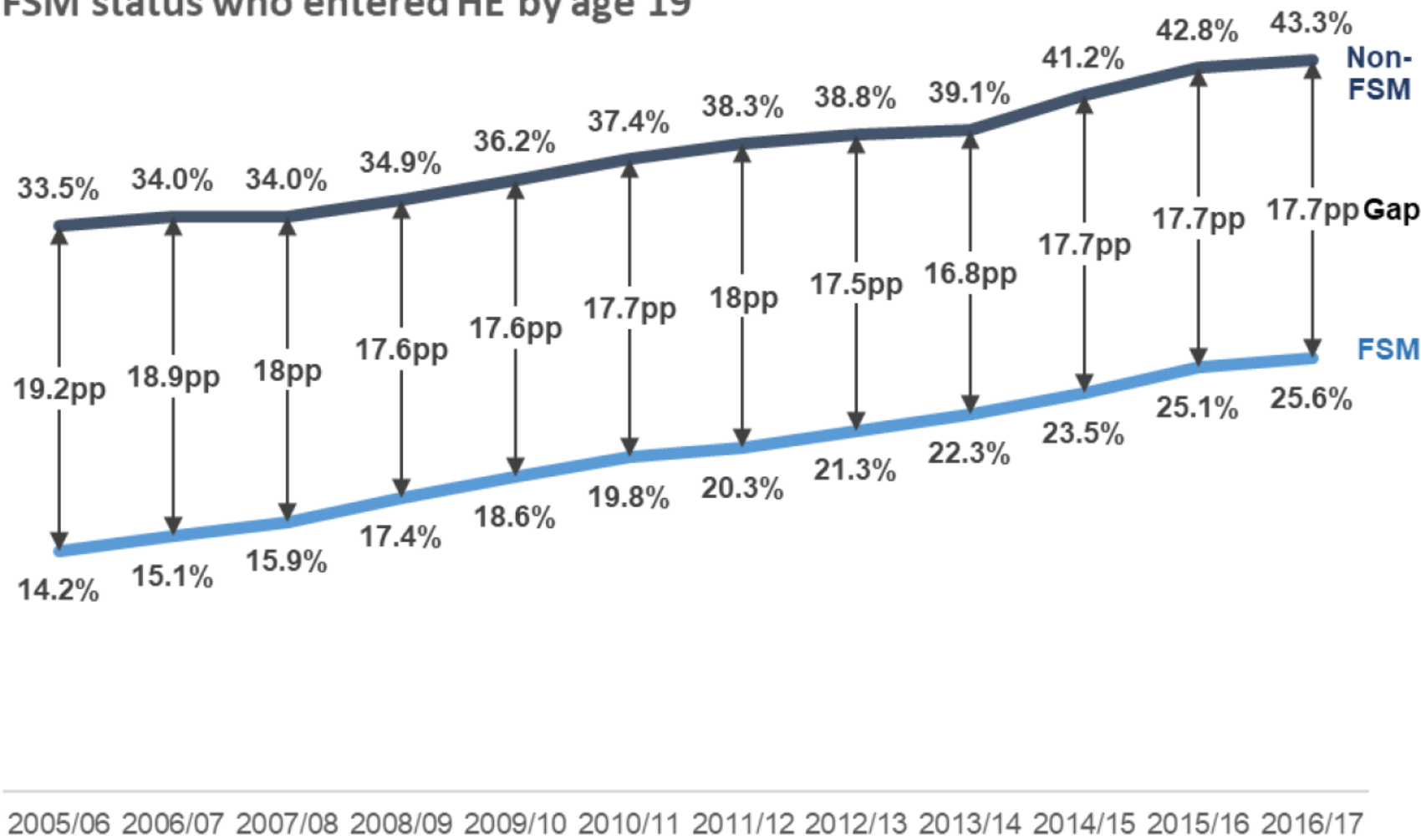
For the first time, Ucas has released data on the backgrounds of UK applicants made by the 30 June deadline, the final deadline before the clearing stage begins, based on their level of disadvantage.

Using the government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, the data show that the number of



# Widening Participation in Higher Education

Estimated percentage of 15 year old state-funded pupils by FSM status who entered HE by age 19



# Different measures of disadvantage

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Conversation between schools and universities about disadvantage can get complicated:

## **Schools – Pupil premium**

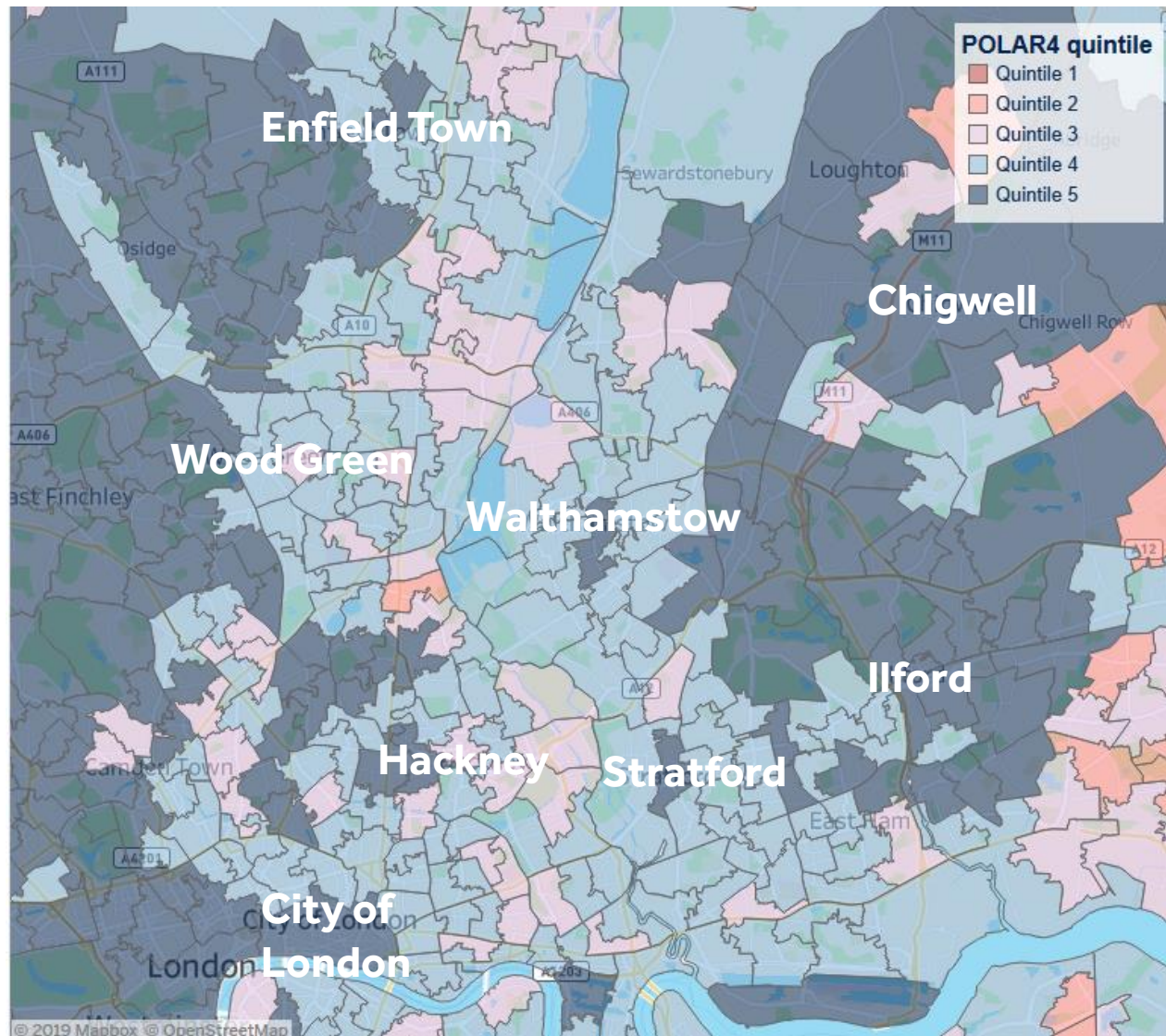
- Free school meals (Ever 6)
- Adopted from care/care leavers
- Service child (Ever 6)

## **Universities – “POLAR”**

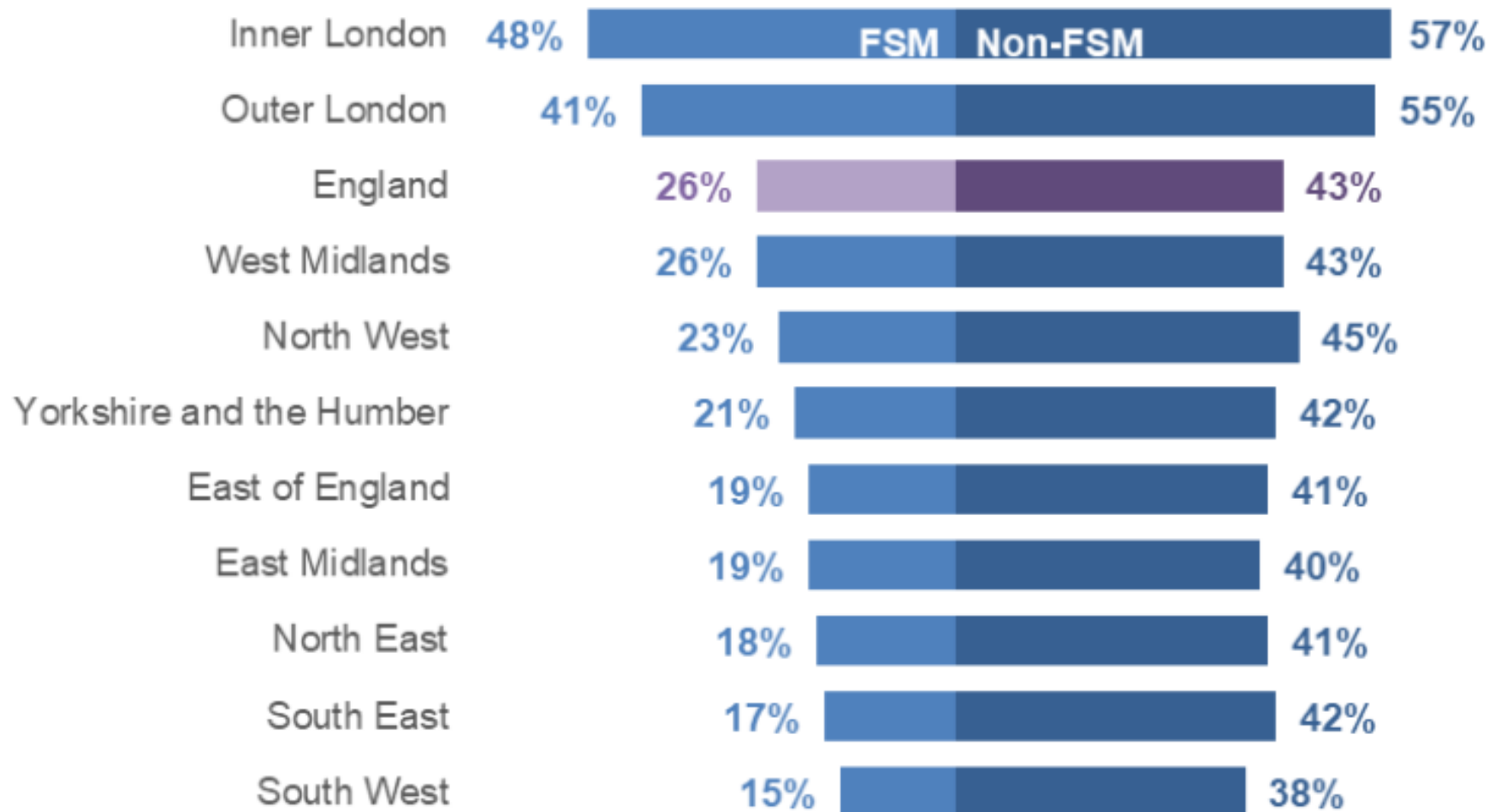
- Geographical – looks at participation rate in the census ward in which the pupil lives
- These kind of geographical measures tend to correlate with socioeconomic background



# HE Participation in East London



# Regional variation in university access





What does  
the research  
tell us?

# Determinants of university access

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- Researchers agree that the best way to enable young people to progress to university is to attain well at school
- The correlation between attainment (including at KS4) and university access is very strong, and this correlation is even stronger for certain subjects
- Most students who get high A level grades progress to selective universities, even if they're from disadvantaged backgrounds...

For students achieving at least AAB with two facilitating subjects...

**90%**

...of students from the  
most advantaged 20% of  
families progress to a high  
status university

**86%**

...of students from the  
least advantaged 20% of  
families progress to a high  
status university

# Who are the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)?

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- An organisation which “generates and applies behavioural insights to inform policy, improve public services and deliver results for citizens and society”
- Once nicknamed the ‘nudge unit’, BIT often explore how light touch low cost interventions to nudge people in to a certain (desirable) behaviour
- For example, how might we ‘nudge’ people to donate more money to charity, pay their taxes on time, give up smoking or agree to donate their organs when they die?







Department  
for Education

# Encouraging People into University

Research report

March 2017

# Reviewing the literature on teacher and adviser behaviour

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- We recently commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team to explore some of the 'behavioural barriers' which may prevent schools from providing optimal support on higher education choices
- The research consisted of an analysis of 11 in depth interviews with teachers/advisers, 40 survey responses and a literature review of 37 relevant published academic papers



# The importance of advice and advisers

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- In some schools advisers/form tutors etc. have quite a wide remit, yet in others they are allowed to specialise (e.g. in supporting applicants to dentistry/medicine etc.
- Schedule appropriate email bulletins throughout the year, and include parents in these when possible!
- Younger advisers need upskilling, older advisers can need to ensure they're not set in their ways
- The impact of encouragement from teachers is greatest for those in the middle third of academic achievement as well as those with lower levels of parental education ([Alcott, 2017](#))

# The power of role models

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- Information about relatable role models, especially those who are behaving counter to a stereotype, are very effective in challenging preconceptions
- How well are the staff in your school able to function as role models? Do you need to bring other role models in?
- Keep track of students who progress to more selective universities, and invite them back in to speak to your students

# Connections with universities

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- You may have a strong connection with local universities, but are these the only universities you have connections with?
- Do students even consider going further a field? Could you organise trips to certain open days to broaden students' horizons? (or encourage paired visits)
- Advisers with high social capital exploit their own connections, e.g. asking an academic they know to read a personal statement



# Your messaging

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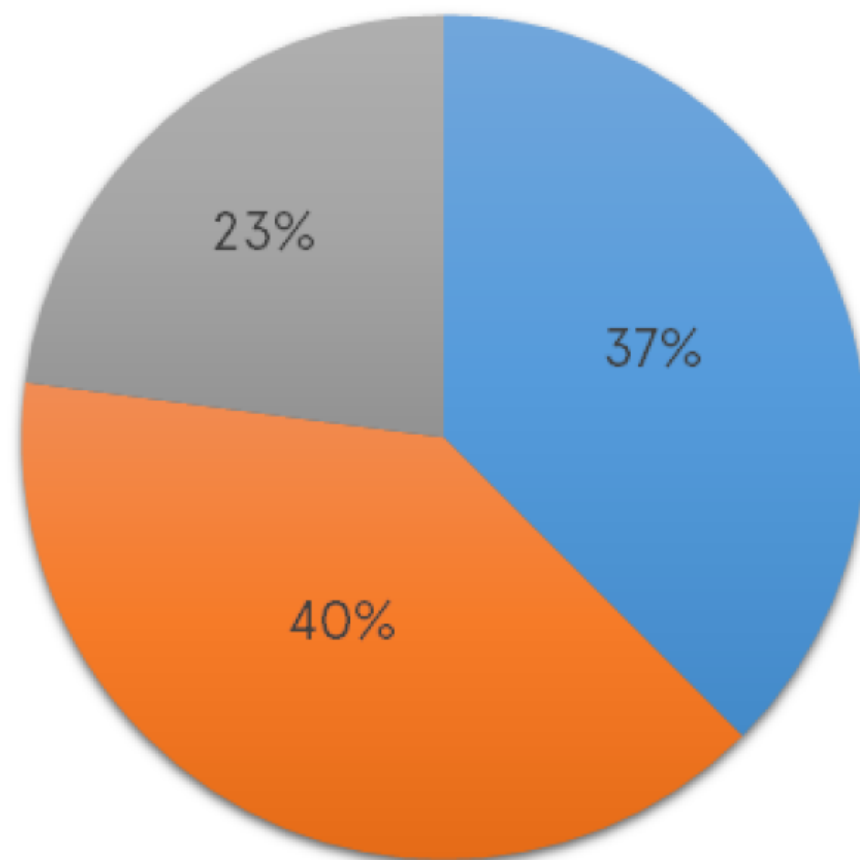
- Not necessarily anything wrong with labelling a student as 'Oxbridge material', but don't make it difficult for a student to express their true preference
- "Are you being realistic?" – don't be guilty of having low expectations. It's a buyer's market for university places at the moment, and disadvantaged students may be made contextual offers
- Entry requirements for selective universities are high but not as high as some people think
- Are the recommendations you present to young people typically based on the judgement of one person? Extend this to two (or more) people if you can

# Which university to choose?

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- 'Distance' continues to be an important factor when it comes to university choices
- Summer Schools can offer a great taste of life away from home
- Some advisers do not seem to distinguish between more selective and less selective universities
- Schools which distinguish between the league table position of different universities tend to send more students to selective universities ([Donnolly, 2015](#))
- Engage with your destinations data – who is going where? What are your trends over time and can you attribute a certain destination with certain advice which has been provided?

Figure 1. Survey responses to the question: 'To what extent do you consider it your role to advise students on which universities to apply to?' (n=40)



- I recommend all universities equally – it's not my place to make a judgement call.
- I encourage my students to apply to the universities where I think they will be happiest.
- I encourage my students to apply to the most selective universities I think they can get into.



# Contextual admissions processes

# What does a 'traditional' admissions process look like?

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In a more traditional admissions process, only the following factors are typically used to make admissions judgments:

- Predicted or actual performance in examinations
- The quality of a candidate's personal statement, including work experience completed etc.
- The teacher's reference
- Performance in an interview or in an additional admissions test
- Extenuating circumstances such as illness or bereavement





# Contextual admissions

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- “Contextual admissions” practices involve using the same factors as in the traditional process but with some extra factors included to build up a more holistic picture of a candidate
- Contextual admissions are not new, they have been used to a varying extent for at least 15 years but the use of them is becoming increasingly common
- Each university has the freedom to make its own judgment about their own contextual admissions policy, and research and debate around these policies is ongoing



# The history of contextualised admissions

## Determinants of degree performance in UK universities: a statistical analysis of the 1993 student cohort

JEREMY SMITH and ROBIN NAYLOR<sup>†</sup>

*University of Warwick*

### I. Introduction

This paper presents the results of an analysis of the academic performance of undergraduate students leaving UK universities in 1993. The analysis is based on a unique data-set which contains the full cohort of students at 'old' universities, information on the characteristics of the last school attended prior to university entrance. The data also include information on their prior qualifications and on their social class background.

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**Private schools 'boycott' Bristol**

**Head teachers at independent schools are to discourage sixth-formers from applying to Bristol because of claims the university discriminates against private school pupils.**



Bristol has been accused of turning down good students

A group which represents the heads of public schools says it is advising its members not to encourage children to apply for Bristol.

The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) and the Girls' Schools Association (GSA) are stopping short of a boycott, because they say their members cannot stop children from applying where they want to.

But their advice signals an attempt to increase pressure on

**WATCH AND LISTEN**  
**The BBC's Mike Baker**  
"Independent schools think Bristol is discriminating against those from good schools"

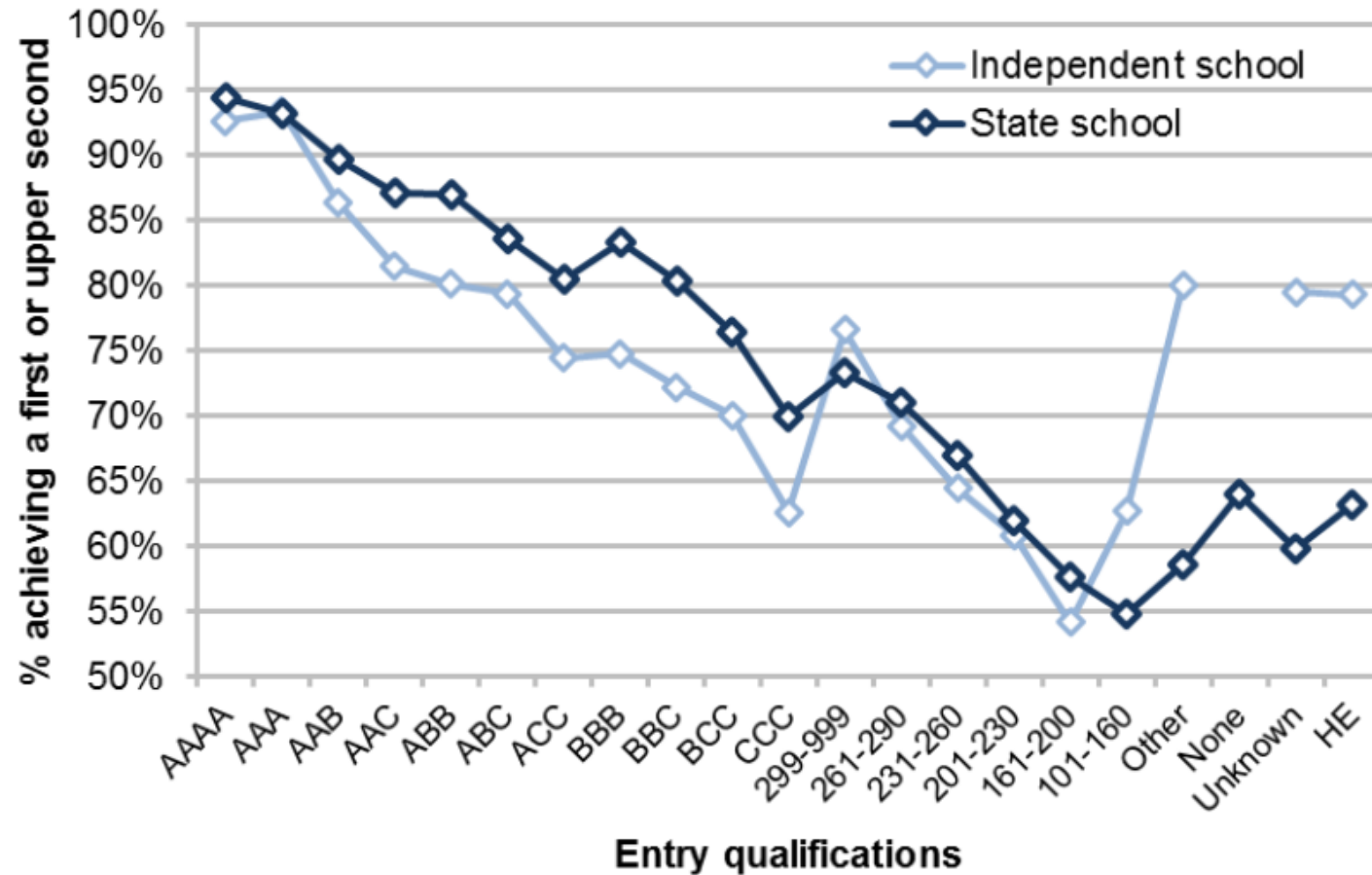
**VIDEO**

**BBC BRISTOL**  
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# Recent data...

**Figure 14: 2013-14 graduates by previous school, entry qualification and degree classification**



# Table discussion



Which of these factors might be taken in to consideration in a university's contextual admissions policy?

Pupil premium/  
Free School Meals

Illness

Being in care

Ethnicity

Gender

Parental level  
of education

Attending an  
underperforming school

Household  
income

Disability

Living in a geographical area  
where not many students  
attend university

Participation in  
outreach schemes



# Which factors are 'contextual'?

1. Individual level:  
First generation at university, in care or carer, household income, disability, refugee, asylum seeker, traveler
2. Area level:  
Postcode used to either estimate socioeconomic status (Acorn, IMD etc.) or determine rate of HE participation in the area (e.g. POLAR4)
3. School level:  
Attainment at KS4 and/or KS5, school type, progression rate to HE, average economic circumstances of pupils
4. Participation in outreach  
Summer Schools, Widening Participation programmes linked to universities (not always transferrable)

Source: [The Sutton Trust \(2017\)](#)





# Contextual factors might play a role in determining...

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Whether an applicant receives an offer

The grades asked for in a conditional offer

Whether to invite a candidate for an interview

Entitlement for scholarships and bursaries

Entitlement to apply to certain courses (e.g. foundation years)

Whether to provide further consideration at clearing / prioritisation for near misses

## What can you do to support your students?

- Encourage students to start thinking about taking part in outreach activity at an early stage (end of Year 11 onwards)
- Make sure students factor in potential grade reductions when making their five UCAS choices
- Students can mention contextual information in their personal statement
- Teachers can corroborate this in the reference, and provide contextual information about the school too
- Use the [POLAR postcode checker](#)



# Advancing Access Contextual Admissions Guide

## A guide to leading universities' use of contextual information

### Content type

Contextual admissions policies

### Audience

Teacher training resource

### Description

This page provides a summary of the contextual admissions policy at each of the 24 Russell Group universities.

Please note that universities change their policies from time to time, so we recommend that you use this page alongside the websites of the universities themselves. If you require clarification about a particular university's policy, please contact the university directly.

University of Birmingham



University of Bristol



University of Cambridge



Cardiff University



Durham University



University of Edinburgh



University of Exeter



University of Glasgow



## Guidebook



How do admissions processes work?



## Information sheets



Admissions processes - myth-busting



Admissions glossary



Top tips for supporting students who do not have a confirmed place



## Presentations



Presentation slides - supporting students through the application process



Presentation notes - Supporting students through the application process



## Contextual admissions policies



A guide to leading universities' use of contextual information



# Using Advancing Access resources

## How do admissions processes work?

**Content type**  
Guidebook


**Audience**  
Teacher training resource

**Description**  
This resource will help you understand the admissions processes operated by Advancing Access university partners.

Here we take you behind the scenes to give you a sense of how admissions are assessed. Every university operates different admission processes, but this guidebook provides a general overview rather than a guide to the specific process of each university.

This guidebook covers the different ways that applications are assessed, what contextual information, what admissions staff look for and how to support students responding to university decisions.


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**Contextual admissions**



Resource for teachers and their learners



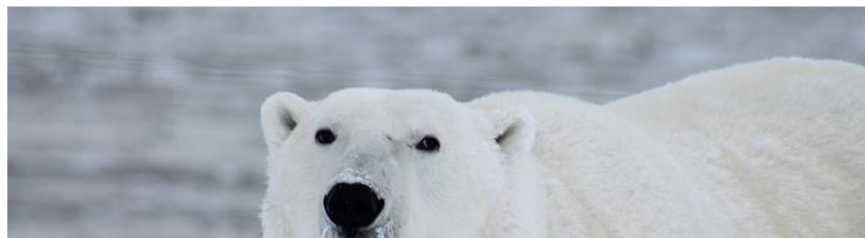
## What is POLAR and how does it differ from other measures of disadvantage?

8 April, 2019 8 minutes



Paul Martin  
Project Manager, Advancing Access

If ever there's a situation where universities and schools are talking a different language when it comes to a given topic, we see part of our job as being the interpreter.



# Research on teacher behaviour


Articles

## Gatekeepers or facilitators: the influence of teacher habitus on students' applications to elite universities

Caroline Oliver  & Nigel Kettley

Pages 737-753 | Received 26 Jan 2010, Accepted 16 Apr 2010, Published online: 15 Nov 2010

 Download citation  <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2010.515105>

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### Abstract

Low application rates of state school students to elite universities have been identified as a factor in their limited participation in elite universities. This article explores the role of teachers in state schools and colleges in guiding higher education (HE) choice. Drawing on qualitative research with teachers and students in six institutions, we identify differential practices that corroborate explanations of an 'institutional habitus' shaping students' likely pathways to HE. However, we suggest that attention is paid to teacher habitus, demonstrating how teachers' political and ethical dispositions as well as their social capital are potential factors shaping students' decision-making about HE, and elite university applications in particular.

Keywords: applications, Bourdieu, elite universities, higher education, teachers

# Gatekeepers...

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"...these teachers were not necessarily less consciously considering their roles or merely reproducing expected outcomes. They were equally reflexive in relation to class habitus but did so by **focusing on the potential of their students completing their courses at university rather than purely participating**. These teachers conceived of their role as guardians, to keep students 'safe' from potentially alienating and uncomfortable experiences that might, in their view, ultimately disrupt their learning. Teachers at Kingsgate, Jackport and Queenscourt were **sympathetic to students' attitudes that they might not 'fit in' at elite universities**. They themselves had limited networks in these institutions and were less confident in the advice that they could offer to students. Feeling less comfortable themselves in their dealings with these institutions, the teachers **felt sympathy with the potential dangers of students being 'out of place'** and therefore did not always challenge this view. Their limited promotion of elite universities was an affective response, arising from concern about their students' 'happiness', welfare and ultimately their potential to complete the course. As such, **their students were encouraged less to challenge expected pathways** by considering elite universities."



## Facilitators...

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“This group of teachers were driven by a social justice agenda to increase participation rates of their students at elite universities. They **held the conviction that the *status quo* was unjust** and they were instrumental in trying to change existing outcomes. The facilitators engaged in practical attempts to encourage non-traditional students to consider options beyond the habitual and **challenged the inferiority ingrained in their students’ habituses**. These teachers **offered alternatives to overcome students’ inclinations to remain local** and acted as their advocates when making applications to elite universities. Often this was reinforced by their possession of social capital, as they were able and willing to **exploit past experiences and current networks** for their students’ benefit, to improve students’ personal statements and interview practice and to bridge the perceived social distance between school and elite institutions.”

# Questions?

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