ADMISSIONS IN CONTEXT

The use of contextual information by leading universities

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Contents

Foreword

This month, the Director for Fair Access to Higher Education called for fundamental changes to widening participation at universities. Progress with encouraging more young people from low and moderate income backgrounds into higher education has been slowing. While the number of disadvantaged pupils going to university has increased over the past decade, the access gap at our most selective institutions remains stubborn and wide. Getting a degree from a top university is one of the surest routes to a good job, but those from less privileged homes are substantially under-represented in the best universities. We need radical change to shift this, and a central element must include a greater use of contextual admissions.

Contextual admissions, where the social background of a university applicant is taken into account in the application process, leading to a reduced grade offer or other forms of priority, is a crucial tool in the battle to widen access to higher education. Reflecting the difficulty of the journey taken by those from disadvantaged backgrounds should be a common sense principle in university admissions. Low social mobility and lack of educational opportunity is arguably the biggest social challenge of our times. To tackle this, it is crucial that young people from low and moderate income backgrounds have a fair chance of getting in to the best universities.

This is widely accepted at the top Ivy League universities in the US. I have seen it in action at Harvard where I sat in on an admissions decision meeting. Top American universities give less advantaged students a break, in contrast to many of our leading universities. This report shows that some of the UK's most selective universities do recognise this necessity too. However more needs to be done to ensure that contextual data can deliver on the promise of transforming access to higher education.

Universities need to focus more on information that reflects the individual circumstances of the applicant, and there needs to be greater transparency and consistency. Those from less well-off backgrounds are less likely to have access to the information and networks that can help them navigate complicated admissions processes. We need to make sure candidates are aware when and how they may benefit from contextualisation.

As the report highlights, outreach programmes play a crucial role in improving access to the best universities. The Sutton Trust plays its part, supporting over 4,000 young people a year on our Summer Schools and Pathways programmes, and helping 12-15 year-olds through Sutton Scholars. But a more joined-up approach to outreach programmes and admissions across the country is needed, with greater information sharing across universities. It's also important that we get a better idea of what works when it comes to widening participation. We want to see much better evaluation of programmes and are working with the Office for Fair Access to ensure that access initiatives are cost effective.

Going to university from a low or moderate income background is a major step towards social mobility. But what is worrying is that these students are much less likely to go to the most selective institutions or study the most competitive subjects. It is vital to improve access to these universities and subjects if we are to improve social mobility. Putting admissions in context will play a central role in that.

I am very grateful to Professor Vikki Boliver, Dr Claire Crawford and their team for this important research.

Sir Peter Lampl, Founder and Chairman of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation

Executive Summary

- While the university access gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers has narrowed somewhat in recent years, the gap at the most selective universities remains stubbornly wide. Contextualised admissions – taking into account a candidate's background when making decisions on whom to admit – is one way through which universities may be able to make greater progress towards narrowing these gaps.

- Analysis of information made available via university websites during the 2016-17 academic year by a group of the UK's most selective universities, the Sutton Trust (ST) 30, indicates that a majority of these universities use contextual data to inform their admissions processes. Four types of contextual indicators are commonly used: individual-level, area-level, school-level, and participation in outreach programmes. Individual indicators, such as having been in receipt of free school meals, are the least commonly used. Participation in widening access programmes is the most common contextual indicator used, with two-thirds of ST30 universities reporting that they take this into account, although this is often restricted to programmes run by the same institution.

- The widening participation programmes run by these universities use a wider variety of contextual indicators when selecting participants, with far greater use of individual level indicators in particular. For example, most of the ST30 universities who run widening participation programmes linked to contextualised admissions use first in family to attend higher education (HE) or having been in care as an indicator of contextual disadvantage, and just over half use receipt of free school meals. The majority also use POLAR data, which captures neighbourhoods with low HE participation rates. However, around half of the universities offering widening access programmes associated with contextualised admissions include indicators of strong prior academic performance among their eligibility requirements, potentially creating barriers for disadvantaged students.

- Universities report using contextual indicators in different ways. 18 universities mentioned that contextual applicants could be prioritised for a reduced grade offer at one or more grades below the standard offer – for example, AAB or ABB at A-level rather than AAA. However, in many cases this was at the discretion of departments or restricted in other ways, for example conditional on successful completion of a widening access programme.

- A substantial number provided no information to applicants about how indicators would be used, with some others indicating only that such applications would be given additional consideration, without further details. This lack of transparency is a barrier to access, as potentially eligible students – often those with fewer networks and least access to information – may be unaware that they may benefit from contextual admissions processes.

- Indeed, this might help to explain why analysis of administrative data on students attending ST30 universities finds little evidence that those from contextual backgrounds are being admitted to these universities in large numbers or with average grades substantially lower than their peers from non-contextual backgrounds. The analysis shows that there is a wide distribution of grades among those from better-off backgrounds – with as many as one in five students from higher participation neighbourhoods being admitted with A-level grades of BBC or below, for example – and that the average grades of those from contextual backgrounds are only marginally lower than those from non-contextual backgrounds. The largest difference is found for students who were previously in

receipt of free school meals: their A-level results are, on average, one grade lower than those who were not. For all other indicators considered, the differences are even smaller – sometimes just a quarter of a grade.

- The analysis reveals little difference in the entry requirements of courses studied by students from different backgrounds. Using estimates of the standard offers made to those from more advantaged backgrounds on each course, in six of the 25 ST30 universities in England students from low participation neighbourhoods have lower average A-level results than the standard offer, suggesting the use of contextualisation. However, these differences are small – less than half an A-level grade on average.

- There are also a small number of courses for which we can separately estimate the offer that appears to have been made to students from contextual backgrounds. If lower than the standard offer, this might also suggest the use of contextualisation. The results of these two sets of analysis point to a small number of universities who appear to be successfully admitting students from disadvantaged backgrounds with slightly lower grades on to their courses, including Bristol, Exeter, Birmingham and Newcastle. However, there remains significant scope for greater contextualisation at most selective universities.

- Moreover, we find little evidence that should discourage universities from doing so. While the data does not reveal what additional support, if any, may have been provided to students admitted under contextualisation, we find little evidence to suggest that leading universities that practice greater contextualisation see significantly higher dropout rates, lower degree completion rates, or lower degree class results, suggesting that there is no reason why students admitted via contextualised admissions processes cannot succeed at top universities.

- Greater use of contextual admissions could result in a substantial increase in the numbers of low income students at the UK's most selective universities. 85% of students at these universities are admitted onto courses with a requirement of ABB or above. If this were to be lowered by two grades, to BBC, then, each year, about 750 students previously eligible for free school meals with grades of BBB or BBC who do not currently attend a ST30 institution could potentially go. If all these students were admitted, there would be a 50% increase in the number of FSM-eligible students admitted to our leading universities (from around 1,500 to around 2,250 each year).

- Other ways to widen access might also prove successful. For example, foundation year programmes are offered by some universities, which can serve as an alternative route into undergraduate programmes for those from contextually disadvantaged backgrounds. In these programmes, students use the year to build their knowledge to a level that prepares them to access the full degree course. Many ST30 universities offer such programmes. However, many are targeted at overseas or mature students and only half of these programmes specifically target those from disadvantaged backgrounds, leaving scope to improve their role in widening access.

Recommendations

1. **Universities should use contextual data in their admissions process** to open up access to students from less privileged backgrounds. Highly selective universities in particular, where low and middle-income students are substantially under-represented, should make greater use of contextual admissions, including reduced grade offers, to widen access.

2. **There should be a greater use of individual-level contextual indicators**, such as previous eligibility for free school meals, as well as school-level and area-level criteria. Verified individual criteria are not widely used for general applicants, yet better capture the personal circumstances of applicants. The UCAS contextual data service can provide this information to universities.

3. **Universities practicing contextualisation should provide additional support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds**, including those who have been admitted with lower grades, in recognition of the additional difficulties such students may face.

4. **There should be greater transparency from universities when communicating how contextual data is used**. If they are to take advantage of access measures, it is crucial that applicants are aware if and how they may benefit from contextualisation. Universities should publicise the criteria for contextual admissions clearly on their websites, along with how and when they are taken into account. There should also be greater clarity and consistency in the reporting of contextual admissions processes in access agreements with the Director of Fair Access, including reporting levels of contextually admitted applicants.

5. **Foundation year provision should be increased, with greater targeting of those from disadvantaged backgrounds**. Foundation years – or differentiated first years as in some Scottish four-year courses - can help to widen access, and supported learning in a 'Year 0' can help to bridge a wider attainment gap for those admitted contextually.

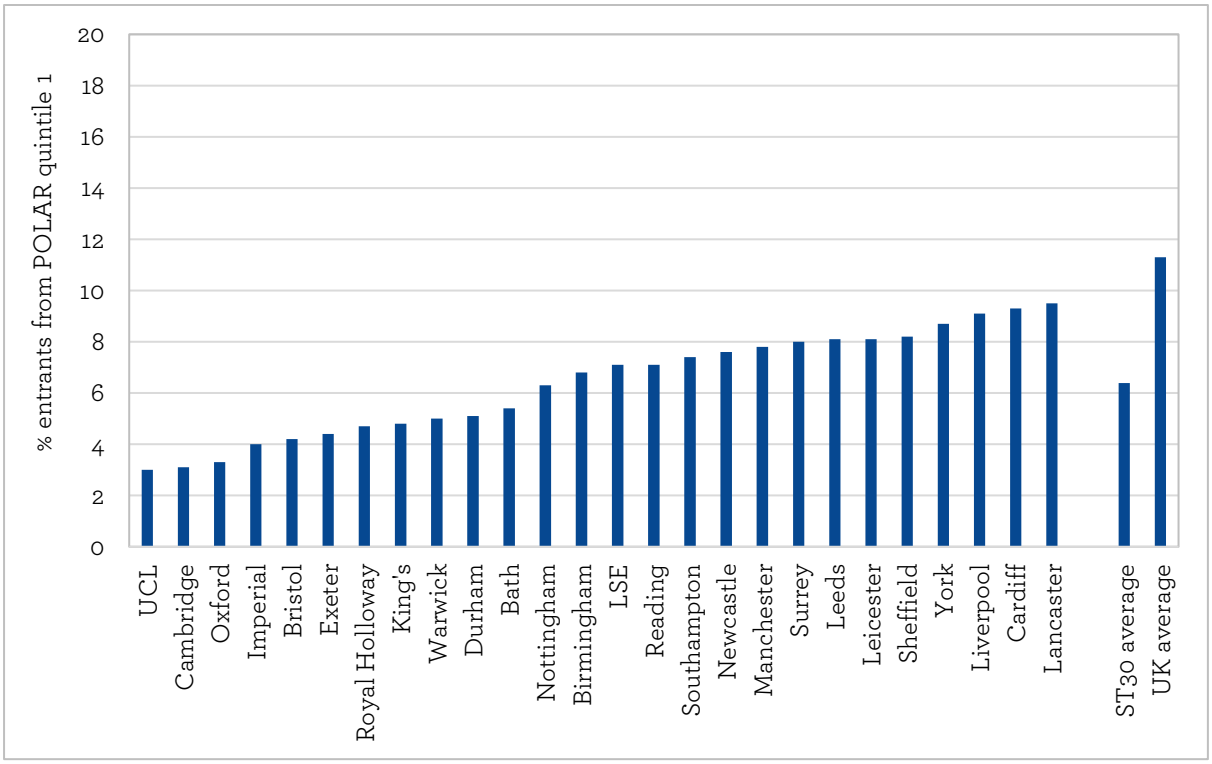
6. **Participation in outreach programmes should be shared as a contextual indicator across universities**. Outreach programmes tend to be targeted at areas or schools local to the region in which the university is located, but participation is typically only used as contextual information by the university running the programme. Universities, potentially facilitated by UCAS, should share this data across institutions so participation in another university's outreach programme can be taken into account.

7. Many outreach programmes include academic eligibility criteria set at a high threshold. However, this is likely to exclude disadvantaged pupils with the potential to do well at university, but whose GCSE results are not exceptional. **Universities, and those who run similar outreach programmes, should consider more inclusive thresholds** to reduce barriers to participation and increase access.

1. Introduction

The ambition to widen participation in higher education significantly remains high on the policy agenda. But progress towards the UK government's target of doubling the proportion of university entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2020 relative to the figure for 2009 has been slow. In 2009/10, just 9.6% of UK domiciled young full-time first degree entrants came from areas with the lowest rates of participation in higher education nationally (POLAR quintile 1); by 2015/16 this proportion had increased only slightly, to 11.3%.[1] The UK's most selective universities, including those that make up the Sutton Trust 30, typically have the lowest proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Figure 1 shows, in 2015/16, those from POLAR quintile 1 areas made up on average just 6.4% of UK domiciled full-time entrants to first degree programmes at Sutton Trust 30 universities located in England and Wales, with some universities performing especially poorly on this widening access measure.

Figure 1: Percentages of UK domiciled young entrants to full-time first degree programmes at Sutton Trust universities in England and Wales who come from a low participation neighbourhood (POLAR quintile 1)



Widening access to the UK's most selective universities is an important means of increasing social mobility. Recent research has shown that the labour market returns to higher education tend to be significantly higher for graduates from more selective institutions and programmes.[2] UK universities generally and highly selective UK universities in particular are increasingly being called upon to

[1] Widening participation summary: UK Performance Indicators 2015/16, published by HESA, 17 February 2017. Available online at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/widening-participation-summary.
[2] Britton, J., Dearden, L., Shephard, N. and Vignoles, A. (2016) How English domiciled graduate earnings vary with gender, institution attended, subject and socio-economic background. IFS Working Paper W16/06.

demonstrate their commitment to widening participation and to make faster progress towards improving the representation of entrants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

One way of achieving this may be to make greater use of 'contextualised' admissions – in other words, to take account of the background of potential candidates when considering their applications, in recognition of the fact that the school achievements of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often do not do justice to their academic potential. This may result in downward adjustments to typical academic entry requirements for disadvantaged applicants, such as reducing the standard offer made to other candidates by one or two grades, but may potentially take other forms as well.

Survey data suggests that the majority of UK universities are now using contextual data in some way to inform undergraduate admissions decisions.[3] However, little is known about which of the UK's most selective universities are currently contextualising admissions; about how they are identifying contextually disadvantaged applicants; about what actions universities are taking in relation to applications from those identified as contextually disadvantaged; and what scope there is to substantially adjust academic entry requirements for contextually disadvantaged learners without compromising student outcomes. This report sets out to provide some answers to these questions.

The report proceeds as follows: Section 2 sets out our methodology; Section 3 presents the results of an analysis of publicly available data from university websites and other documents setting out how they make use of contextual data; Section 4 presents analysis of individual-level administrative data of students attending ST30 universities, illustrating the extent to which they have been successful in admitting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds with lower A-level grades than the standard entry requirements, and whether this appears to have had any detrimental effect on student outcomes; Section 5 investigates another form of contextualisation – the provision of foundation years; Section 6 concludes.

[3] Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (2016) SPA's Use of Contextualised Admissions Survey Report 2015 (with HEDIIP). Available online at: https://www.spa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Research-CA-survey-report-2015_1.pdf

2. Methodology

This report uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve these aims.

Section 3 analyses publicly available data on the types of contextual indicators universities use and the ways in which they report to be using them to inform their admissions processes. The information was collected from institutional websites during the 2016/7 academic year. We began with each institution's undergraduate admissions landing page and followed through links to other relevant webpages and downloadable documents, including Access Agreements (for 2017-18) and Outcome Agreements (for 2016-17). Further information about three illustrative examples of contextual data use was obtained by means of telephone interviews with widening participation and admissions leads at the University of Bristol, the University of Newcastle and the University of Leeds during the summer of 2017.

Section 4 uses linked administrative data on all English-domiciled students entering a UK university between 2004-05 and 2012-13.[4] Of particular importance for our purposes is that it includes a limited set of indicators of individuals' socio-economic background – including receipt of free school meals at age 16, the characteristics of the schools in which they took their GCSEs and A-levels, the higher education participation rate of the local neighbourhood in which they live when they enter university, and whether either of their parents went to university – as well as detailed information on their A-level grades.

We restrict attention to students studying full-time for a first degree in a single subject, and exclude those studying medicine.[5] We focus on the 25 ST30 institutions in England,[6] as we want to use A-level grades to infer the offers made to students on each course, which is more difficult for universities that admit substantial numbers of students with different qualifications (particularly Scottish highers).

For our descriptive analysis, we consider four contextual indicators:

- Receipt of free school meals at age 16;
- Living in a neighbourhood with a low (bottom 40%) higher education participation rate;
- Neither parent went to university;
- Attended a school with low (bottom 40%) achievement at Key Stage 4.[7]

To understand whether universities are using contextualisation to admit students from disadvantaged backgrounds with lower A-level grades, we would like to compare the offers made to students from non-contextual backgrounds to the A-level grades of students admitted to the course from contextual backgrounds. If universities are making lower entry offers to those from contextual backgrounds, then we would be more likely to see the average A-level scores for these students being below the standard offers made to those from non-deprived backgrounds.

[4] This is the National Pupil Database – which contains the universe of students taking GCSEs in England – linked to data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency on the universe of students attending universities in the UK (the linked NPD-HESA data).
[5] We omit those studying for combined degrees, as we don't observe specific enough information to identify individual courses. We omit those studying medicine, as we go on to analyse degree outcomes – including degree class – for our sample of students, and many medical students are not awarded a degree class.
[6] These are: Bath, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Exeter, Imperial, Kings, Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, LSE, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Reading, Royal Holloway, Sheffield, Southampton, Surrey, UCL, Warwick, York.
[7] Achievement here is measured by the percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-C grades at GCSE.

We do not observe the offers that were actually made to students, so we try to estimate them based on the distributions of A-level grades amongst those who were admitted to the course. To do so, we focus on students' three best A-level results – excluding subjects like general studies – as this is the basis on which many universities make offers. We assign points to each of these grades using the "old" UCAS tariff points scale, in which an A* is worth 140 points, an A worth 120 points, and so on, down to an E grade, worth 40 points.

To estimate the offers that were made to students from non-contextual backgrounds, we focus on those who lived in one of the neighbourhoods with the 60% highest rates of HE participation POLAR quintiles 3-5 (although we checked our results using other measures as well), and only consider courses catering for at least 30 such students.[8]

We tested a wide variety of ways of estimating the offers that were made to students on these courses, but settled on the lowest A-level points score for which the following statements hold true: a) at least 15% of POLAR Q3-5 students on the course have exactly this number of points (and do so based on consecutive grades);[9] b) no more than 20% of POLAR Q3-5 students have A-level points below this level. These criteria were determined based on the idea that we would expect a significant percentage of students to just meet (rather than exceed) the entry requirement, and that the percentage of students admitted with grades below this level – through clearing, or with combinations of A-levels and other qualifications (which we do not pick up in our data) – would not be very high.

Having tested a variety of combinations of these criteria, we selected the one for which we were able to calculate offers for a reasonable number of courses (2,170 in total, equivalent to 49% of all courses across ST30 universities between 2004-05 and 2012-13)[10] and where we thought the estimated offers were likely to be reasonably accurate. For example, if we look at the offers we estimate were made for the same course in the same institution in different years, in 75% of cases did the offer stay the same or increase in every year (which is what we would expect – rather than seeing offers falling from year to year).

We also tried to determine directly whether lower offers were made to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is more difficult, as there are much smaller numbers of these students on each course. But for the small number of courses where this was possible (663 in total), we adopted the same methodology as outlined above, except that the students of interest here were those in POLAR Q1-2 and we allowed there to be just 20 students on the course (rather than 30) in order to increase our sample size without detrimentally affecting the accuracy of our predictions.

Section 5 focuses on the provision of foundation year (Year 0) programmes which are designed to serve as a route into Year 1 of an undergraduate degree programme for those whose qualifications don't meet standard entry requirements. Information about foundation year provision was sourced from the websites of ST30 universities during the 2016/17 academic year and cross-checked using the UCAS course finder tool.

[8] We also considered those with at least 20 students, but this did not significantly increase the percentage of courses for which we could identify offers, and introduced a higher risk of inaccuracies.
[9] By this we mean that while it's possible to get 280 points from grades ABD or BBC, BBC is more likely to reflect a real university entry offer, so students who achieve 280 points via ABD aren't counted towards our 15% total.
[10] The courses for which we were able to estimate offers were, in general, higher tariff ones (with average A-level scores nearly two grades higher than those for which we could not estimate offers) catering for slightly more advantaged students, but were of broadly similar size and ranged across a variety of subjects and institutions.

3. The use of contextual data by Sutton Trust 30 universities

This section describes the ways in which Sutton Trust 30 universities are using contextual data about the socioeconomic circumstances of prospective students to widen access according to information available via their websites during the 2016/17 admissions cycle. We summarise the indicators of contextual disadvantage being used by ST30 universities – distinguishing between contextual indicators applicable to the general applicant, and those that determine eligibility for participation in a widening access scheme which is later used as a contextual flag for admissions purposes – and we examine how these contextual indicators are being used to inform admissions decisions, for example, to prioritise socioeconomically disadvantaged applicants for standard offers or to reduce entry requirements for such students by a set number of grades. In section five, we also explore the provision of foundation year programmes at ST30 universities which can be accessed by learners from contextually disadvantaged backgrounds who may not otherwise meet standard entry requirements, and which serve as a 'Year 0' route into undergraduate degree courses. To illustrate the range of approaches, two case studies of institutional practice are given: specifically, contextual offer-making to applicants in general at Bristol University, and a widening participation scheme leading to a contextual offer at Newcastle University.

The use of contextual data to inform undergraduate offer making

The contextual indicators referred to on university websites in relation to offer-making are of four broad types:

- **Individual-level contextual indicators** – these indicators refer specifically to the circumstances of individual applicants and/or their immediate households. They relate variously to: economic disadvantage (receipt of free school meals, low household income), socio-economic disadvantage (no parental higher education, parents not in professional occupations), and serious adverse personal circumstances likely to lead to educational underachievement (has spent time in care, is a carer for others, is from a traveller background, is a refugee or asylum seeker, has a disability, is a mature student, can only participate in higher education locally, or has suffered educational disruption due to circumstances such as serious illness or bereavement). Most are based on self-reports by applicants themselves; however, a small number are administratively verified (for example, receipt of free school meals) or could be verified (for example, low household income, has spent time in care, is a refugee or asylum seeker, has a disability, is a mature student).

- **Area-level contextual indicators** – these indicators are *proxies* for the circumstances of individuals, based on the average circumstances of individuals and households in the same locale as the individual concerned. They relate to: the prevalence of socio-economic disadvantage in the locale (ACORN, Output Area Classification, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for England, SIMD for Scotland, and Communities First for Wales), or the rate at which young people in the locale progress to higher education (POLAR). The average circumstances of those in the same locale are derived from administrative or survey data. Individuals are matched to locales on the basis of their self-declared (and potentially verifiable) home postcode. Some neighbourhood context measures refer to a relatively small number of households (ACORN) whereas others are less granular (including IMD, POLAR) and so are more prone to flagging individuals as personally disadvantaged when they are not.

- **School-level contextual indicators** – these indicators are also *proxies* for the circumstances of individuals, based on the average educational outcomes or circumstances of students attending the same school as the individual concerned. They relate to: the average level of academic achievement of pupils in the school (at key stage 4 or 5 – GCSE or A level - or both), the average rate of progression to higher education (in general or to Oxbridge specifically), or the average economic circumstances of pupils attending the school (% pupils FSM). These school level data are taken from administrative data based on verified individual pupil records. Individuals are matched to schools using self-declared, but verifiable, information from the applicant's current or most recent school. This information may not be declared or be relevant for mature applicants and will be missing for those educated overseas or at home. As with area-level contextual indicators, because school-level indicators are based on aggregate data rather than the circumstances of the individual concerned, they may flag some individuals as personally disadvantaged when they are not.

- **Participation in a widening access scheme** – many ST30 universities employ this as a contextual indicator when assessing applications for admission. These widening access schemes typically involve a sustained period of engagement with the university prior to application and may involve academic assessments which lead to an adjustment of standard entry requirements. Eligibility for these widening access schemes is typically determined by whether individuals meet one or more of the individual and/or area-level indicators of contextual disadvantage, or whether they attend a target school where the rate of progression to higher education is low (in some cases restricted to such schools located within the same city or region as the university concerned).

Table 1 summarises for each ST30 university the contextual indicators considered at the point of undergraduate admissions decision-making during 2016/17 according to information available on university websites. Five of the 30 universities provided no detail on their websites regarding which indicators of contextual disadvantage were considered when assessing applications in general. Of these five universities, two referred simply to contextual data provided by UCAS (Imperial and Lancaster); two gave no guidance to applicants in general but did list the contextual indicators used to determine eligibility to participate in a widening participation scheme which then became a contextual disadvantage marker for admissions purposes (Reading and Surrey, also Lancaster); and one made no reference to contextualised admissions at all (UCL).

Eighteen universities mentioned individual-level contextual indicators in their guidance to applicants in general. The most commonly used individual-level indicator of contextual disadvantage used to assess applications in general was having spent time in care. Seventeen universities used this indicator and typically considered it sufficient on its own to indicate contextual disadvantage. Being a long-term (young adult) carer for a family member was also considered by three universities (Nottingham, Sheffield and St Andrews); educational disruption due to serious adverse personal or family circumstances was considered by three universities (LSE, Nottingham and Sheffield); and having a disability which impacts on day to day activities was considered by two universities (Liverpool and Royal Holloway). Refugee or asylum seeker status was mentioned by two universities (Nottingham and St Andrews); being from a traveller background was mentioned by one university (Nottingham) and mature student status was mentioned by one university (Royal Holloway).

Table 1. Contextual indicators used to inform admissions decisions for all applicants																						
	Individual-level context												Area-level context					School-level context				
University name	Free school meals	Low household income	No parental higher education	Parents non-professional job	Has spent time in care	Long-term carer	Traveller background	Refugee/asylum seeker	Disability	Mature student	Only option is local HEI	Educational disruption	ACORN	Output Area Classification	IMD/ SIMD	Communities First area	POLAR	Low average achievement	Low HE progression school	Low % Oxbridge entry school	High % FSM school	Participant in widening access programme
Bath													✓				✓					✓
Birmingham																	✓	✓				✓
Bristol																		✓	✓			✓
Cambridge					✓									✓			✓	✓		✓		
Cardiff					✓								✓			✓	✓					
Durham					✓								✓					✓				✓
Edinburgh					✓								✓		✓			✓	✓			
Exeter					✓												✓	✓				✓
Glasgow					✓										✓				✓			✓
Imperial	No details given on website beyond mention of UCAS-supplied contextual data																					
King's					✓								✓					✓				✓
Lancaster	No details given on website beyond mention of UCAS-supplied contextual data																					✓
Leeds																						✓
Leicester																						✓
Liverpool					✓				✓				✓				✓	✓				✓
LSE					✓							✓					✓	✓				✓
Manchester					✓								✓				✓	✓				✓
Newcastle																	✓	✓				✓
Nottingham		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓					✓				
Oxford					✓								✓				✓			✓		
Reading	No details given on website																					✓
Royal Holloway					✓				✓	✓							✓	✓				
Sheffield						✓						✓			✓		✓					
Southampton					✓												✓	✓				✓
St Andrews					✓	✓		✓					✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
Strathclyde					✓										✓				✓			✓
Surrey	No details given on website																					✓
UCL	No details given on website																					
Warwick					✓										✓		✓	✓			✓	
York																	✓	✓			✓	✓

Twenty-two universities mentioned area-level contextual indicators in their guidance to applicants in general. The most commonly mentioned area-level indicator of contextual disadvantage was POLAR (16 universities), which focused on those living in areas where the young higher education participation rates are in the bottom 20% or bottom 40% of the distribution. The next most common indicator of this type was ACORN (10 universities), with a focus on categories 4 and 5 (communities characterised as 'Financially Stretched' or facing 'Urban Adversity'). The index of multiple deprivation (IMD) and its Scottish equivalent (SIMD) were mentioned as well or instead by six universities.

Twenty universities mentioned school-level contextual indicators in their guidance to applicants in general. The most common was attendance at a school with a low average level of achievement at Key Stage 4, Key Stage 5 or both (16 universities). Seven universities used attendance at a school with a low rate of progression to higher education in general or to Oxbridge in particular, and two universities referred to schools with a high percentage of pupils in receipt of free school meals.

Case Study 1 provides further details of one institutional example of contextual offer making practice in relation to the general applicant – the Contextual Offer scheme at Bristol University.

Case Study 1. Contextual offer-making at the University of Bristol

The **Contextual Offer Scheme** at the University of Bristol sets out to widen access to the university for applicants from contextually disadvantaged backgrounds by means of a contextual offer typically set at two grades below standard entry requirements. Bristol has been working with schools and colleges with lower than average Key Stage 5 attainment and low progression to higher education to widen educational opportunity since 2006. Targeting schools nationally, the Contextual Offer scheme became University policy in 2009.

Eligibility criteria

Individuals apply to the university through UCAS and Bristol's centralised admissions system flags those eligible for an Aspiring Schools and Colleges scheme offer. The scheme operates nationally, rather than focusing only on local schools. Eligibility depends on applicants meeting ONE of the following criteria verified using publicly available datasets:

- currently attending or have attended in the past year an identified low attainment/low progression school or college in England & Wales
- a home postcode in the lowest two quintiles of the POLAR3 measure
- has participated in and completed one of Bristol University's targeted and intensive pre-admission outreach programmes with guaranteed contextual offer and package of support post-admission
- has spent time in care.

Entry requirements: From 2017 onwards, up to a two grade reduction can be applied across the board to the offers made to contextually identified applicants, including those individuals who have not had any prior engagement with Bristol's outreach programmes. Individuals who have participated in Bristol's outreach programmes may attract a greater reduction to the terms of their offer, and the newly launched Bristol Scholars programme (2017) may facilitate an offer up to four grades lower than standard entry requirements.

Design and delivery: The university has undertaken research to inform the development of its contextual offer making policies. In-house research demonstrated that a one grade reduction would not have a deleterious effect on degree outcomes, and that state school students at Bristol outperformed those from the independent sector with the same grades on entry. This evidence underpinned the first iteration of Bristol's contextual offer making scheme in 2009, involving a one grade reduction applied to any subject (with the exception of particular subjects deemed essential prerequisites for particular degree programmes). In 2016, around 1,000 contextually identified applicants were admitted to the university via the scheme with either a one or two grade reduction applied to typical entry requirements.

Progression: Once admitted to the university through the scheme, students are thereafter 'mainstreamed' and tracked in the usual way. No targeted additional support is provided other than that available for other students. Students admitted through one of the university's outreach/access schemes do, however, have access to targeted support post-admission.

Challenges: A significant challenge for Bristol is the impact of grade reductions on tariff scores and, consequently, position in league tables. Bristol's commitment to increasing the diversity of its student profile however was considered important enough to try this approach in the 2017-2018 admissions cycle whilst closely monitoring the potential impact on tariff.

As the final column of Table 1 shows, 20 universities mentioned participation in a widening access scheme aimed at school-leavers as a contextual indicator for admissions purposes, making it the single most common indicator across all ST30 universities. Table 2 summarises the eligibility criteria for participation in these outreach programmes. As Table 2 shows, the eligibility criteria for widening access schemes for which participation results in a contextual disadvantage marker for admissions purposes included up to six indicators at the individual-level, up to two area-level measures of contextual disadvantage, and more often than not were targeted at particular schools.

Among the widening participation scheme eligibility criteria measured at the individual-level, the most commonly mentioned were: that the individual's parents do not hold a higher education qualification (16 universities); that the individual had spent time in care (14 universities); and/or that they had been in receipt of free school meals (11 universities). A significant minority of universities listed as individual-level eligibility criteria being a long-term carer (six universities); experiencing educational disruption due to serious adverse personal circumstances (six universities); having a disability which impacts on daily life (six universities); coming from a low income household (four universities); or having parents who are not employed in a professional or equivalent-level job (four universities).

The most commonly used area-level criterion for outreach programme eligibility was POLAR (14 universities). A small number used ACORN as well (three universities) or IMD/SIMD instead (two universities). Seventeen universities identified attending a widening access scheme target school as a key eligibility criterion; these were typically schools with low average levels of progression to higher education and often schools located in the same city or region as the university concerned.

It is noteworthy that around half of the universities offering outreach programmes which result in contextual markers for admissions purposes include indicators of strong academic performance or potential among their eligibility requirements. Specifically, these include strong performance at GCSE (eight universities), sometimes including in maths and English (three universities), and/or evidence that the applicant is considered to be likely to achieve grades at Key Stage 5 which are equal or close to the university's standard offer (five universities).

Case Study 2 describes an example of a widening access scheme leading to a contextual offer – the PARTNERS scheme at Newcastle University.

Table 2. Eligibility criteria for widening access schemes, participation in which serves as a contextual indicator for admissions purposes																					
	Individual-level context												Area-level context					Attending a widening access scheme target school	Other eligibility criteria		
University name	Free school meals	Low household income	No parental higher education	Parents non-professional job	Has spent time in care	Long-term carer	Traveller background	Refugee/asylum seeker	Disability	Mature student	Only option is local HEI	Educational disruption	ACORN	Output Area Classification	IMD/ SIMD	Communities First area	POLAR/LPN		Min. GCSE performance	Min. GCSE Maths/English	Min. expected KS5 grades
Bath			✓	✓	✓				✓			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	
Birmingham		✓	✓	✓	✓												✓	✓			
Bristol			✓														✓	✓			✓
Cambridge																					
Cardiff																					
Durham			✓										✓				✓	✓	✓		
Edinburgh																		✓			
Exeter	✓		✓		✓	✓											✓		✓	✓	
Glasgow		✓	✓		✓	✓									✓			✓			
Imperial																					
King's			✓		✓	✓			✓				✓				✓		✓	✓	
Lancaster	✓		✓		✓				✓												✓
Leeds	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓	✓					✓	✓			
Leicester	✓				✓	✓						✓					✓	✓	✓		
Liverpool	✓		✓												✓		✓	✓	✓		
LSE	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓								✓	✓			
Manchester	✓	✓	✓										✓				✓	✓			
Newcastle	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓									✓			✓
Nottingham																					
Oxford																					
Reading			✓		✓												✓	✓	✓		✓
Royal Holloway																					
Sheffield																					
Southampton	✓		✓		✓	✓						✓					✓	✓			
St Andrews																		✓			
Strathclyde																		✓			
Surrey	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓			✓					✓	✓	✓		✓
UCL																					
Warwick																					
York	✓				✓							✓						✓			

Case Study 2. Widening access scheme at Newcastle University

The **PARTNERS** scheme at Newcastle University targets prospective students from contextually disadvantaged backgrounds locally and nationally. Successful completion of the PARTNERS post-A-level summer school leads to a reduced offer of up to two grades below standard entry requirements. The PARTNERS scheme is part of a larger widening participation strategy that begins at primary school level, although it is possible to join the PARTNERS scheme without having previously participated at other curriculum stages.

Eligibility criteria: To be identified as a PARTNERS applicant, individuals are required to meet five core criteria: predicted grades that match or exceed the PARTNERS offer for the course applied for; resident in England; 'home' student fee status; has not already made the transition to university; has not been out of school/college for longer than a year. Eligibility also depends on meeting one or more contextual disadvantage criteria:

- attended a low GCSE or low A-level attainment school
- receiving/entitled to free school meals, pupil premium funding and/or discretionary school/college payments
- in receipt of the personal independence payment (PIP) at the enhanced rate in the daily living and mobility components or the standard rate in both components;
- experienced local authority care for 3+ months
- parent/carer(s) do not have a higher education qualification and the main wage earner in the household does not have a professional occupation
- lives in a neighbourhood which has a high level of financial, economic or social deprivation
- is a young person who has sole or shared responsibility for the care of a relative who is ill, disabled, experiencing mental distress or affected by substance abuse
- is a young person who has no communicative relationship with biological parents/legal guardians without expectation of reconciliation.

Individuals apply to PARTNERS at the same time as they apply to the University, identifying as PARTNERS applicants on the UCAS form. The selection of applicants for offer-making is done centrally in the main but selection decisions are devolved to academics in some subject strands. If selectors want to make an offer to a PARTNERS applicant, the obligation is to make an offer at the PARTNERS rate which is up to two grades lower than the typical offer on condition of successful completion of the summer school. Selectors are not under obligation to make an offer.

Design and delivery: Newcastle University has 20 years' experience of organising residential summer schools for its PARTNERS participants and has seen the number of participants increase from 40 in 1997 to 800+ in 2017. Longitudinal evidence has given confidence that lower school attainment for socio-economically disadvantaged students can be a predictor of success. The summer school takes place following completion of A Levels and involves an intensive 8 days of engagement with PARTNERS offer-holders. The programme includes an

academic strand as well as study and transition skills. Currently the summer school is assessed using 'PASS' or 'PASS with MERIT' categories for most subject strands. Only 22% of Newcastle University's student cohort comes from the North East and the university has exceeded its regional benchmark targets. In order to meet national targets therefore, Newcastle has expanded its widening participation activity nationally.

Progression: Some 96% successfully completed the assessed summer school in 2017 and around 63% will meet the terms of their PARTNERS offer and be admitted to the university. If applicants miss their PARTNERS offer and spare places on the chosen programme applied are available, the applicant may still be admitted if performance at the summer school is at the level of 'Pass with Merit'. Once admitted to the university, student progress is monitored and evaluated via the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). The university uses a "How's it going so far?" questionnaire to flag students at identified points in the university trajectory when particularly vulnerable students are prone to drop out. Students are then signposted and given additional support as required. Retention rates for PARTNERS students are higher than for the university overall.

Challenges: These include capacity issues (the number of summer school places is currently uncapped), and lower levels of graduate-level employment following graduation, in response to which the university is building in more employability support. A further concern is the impact on league tables of accepting students with lower grades; however, commitment from senior university management is seen as a critical mitigating factor. One of the keys to the longevity and success of the PARTNERS initiative has been the ongoing and consistent support from Newcastle's senior management team and successive vice-chancellors who see widening participation as "part of who we are" as a university. One question for the future is the impact of pushing out beyond regional boundaries.

Table 3 summarises *how* ST30 universities reported they were using indicators of contextual disadvantage to inform admissions decisions. Eight universities provided no guidance to the general applicant about how contextual indicators are used, while a further six stated only that applications with contextual flags would be given additional consideration. Of these 13 universities, five appeared to operate contextualised admissions policies only for outreach programme participants and not for applicants generally (Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Reading, and Surrey); one specified how contextual indicators are used in admissions in relation to outreach participants only (Newcastle); six apparently made no specific dispensations for contextually indicated applicants (Cambridge, Imperial, LSE, Oxford, Sheffield, York), and one made no mention of a contextualised admissions policy (UCL).

Twenty-two ST30 universities gave some indication as to how contextual disadvantage flags inform admissions decision making. Of these, five universities mentioned contextually indicated applicants being prioritised for interview: in three cases, this was discretionary for applicants generally, and in two cases this was guaranteed for those who participated in the outreach programme.

Thirteen universities mentioned contextually indicated applicants being prioritised for a standard offer: in eight cases, this was at the discretion of the department or admissions selector; in three cases it

was guaranteed only to outreach participants; and in only two cases was a standard offer guaranteed to contextually indicated applicants generally.

In total, 18 universities mentioned contextually indicated applicants being prioritised for a reduced offer one or more grades below the standard offer. A one grade reduction in the standard offer was at the discretion of the department or admissions selector in eight cases; was guaranteed only to outreach participants in four cases; and was guaranteed to contextually indicated applicants generally in two cases. Twelve universities mentioned the possibility of a reduction in standard entry requirements of two or more grades for contextually disadvantaged applicants, often applicable only to those who participated in the widening access scheme.

Six universities also mentioned that contextually indicated applicants would be prioritised for acceptance as near-miss candidates at confirmation (that is, accepted despite not quite achieving the grades stipulated in their conditional offer of a place). In each case this was at the discretion of the department or admissions selector.

Table 3. How contextual indicators are used to inform admissions decisions							
University name	No info given to applicants in general	Applicants may receive additional consideration for an offer	Prioritised for interview	Prioritised for standard offer	One grade reduction in standard entry requirements	Two or more grade reduction in standard entry requirements	Prioritised for acceptance as near-miss at confirmation
Bath				Discretionary			Discretionary
Birmingham					Guaranteed	Guaranteed*	
Bristol			Guaranteed*	Guaranteed*	Guaranteed		
Cambridge		✓					
Cardiff			Discretionary	Discretionary			Discretionary
Durham				Discretionary	Discretionary/Guaranteed*		
Edinburgh				Guaranteed		Guaranteed	
Exeter				Discretionary	Discretionary		
Glasgow				Guaranteed		Guaranteed	
Imperial		✓					
King's			Discretionary	Discretionary	Discretionary	Discretionary*	Discretionary
Lancaster	✓			Guaranteed*			
Leeds	✓					Guaranteed*	
Leicester	✓					Guaranteed*	
Liverpool						Guaranteed*	Discretionary
LSE		✓					
Manchester				Discretionary	Guaranteed*	Guaranteed*	Discretionary
Newcastle	✓				Guaranteed*		
Nottingham				Discretionary	Discretionary		
Oxford		✓					
Reading	✓		Guaranteed*	Guaranteed*			
Royal Holloway							Discretionary
Sheffield		✓					
Southampton			Discretionary	Discretionary	Discretionary	Discretionary*	
St Andrews					Discretionary	Discretionary	
Strathclyde					Discretionary	Guaranteed*	
Surrey	✓				Guaranteed*		
UCL	✓						
Warwick					Discretionary	Discretionary	
York	✓						

* participants in widening participation scheme only

Implications of current practices

Contextual admissions for the general applicant

It is noteworthy that, although many ST30 universities use individual-level contextual indicators as eligibility criteria for outreach programmes which result in contextual flags for admissions purposes, individual-level indicators are rarely used to inform admissions decisions for the general applicant (those who have not participated in the university's outreach programme). This is concerning because individual-level indicators are generally more valid than area-level or school-level indicators (because they relate directly to the personal circumstances of the individual and/or their immediate household), and are highly reliable if sourced from or verified with reference to administrative records maintained by government departments, schools or local authorities.

Most obviously, universities could be encouraged to use eligibility for free school meals as a contextual indicator for all applicants, since this is an unequivocal indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage and can be verified either by the applicant's school or by linking applicant data with free school meals data available in the National Pupil Database. Other indicators of low family income, such as parental receipt of unemployment benefits and tax credits, are also highly valid and potentially verifiable forms of data for use as contextual indicators for all applicants. The administrative burden of verifying such information is potentially high, but could be pooled across the sector, most obviously by being a centralised activity performed by UCAS using their Contextual Data Service.

Contextual admissions related to participation in widening access schemes

It is appropriate that participation in outreach programmes targeted at contextually disadvantaged students should itself become a marker of contextual disadvantage. However, many of these outreach programmes are restricted to schools local to the city or region in which the university is located. This makes sense for the purposes of delivering outreach activities, and since contextually disadvantaged students disproportionately attend universities close to home. But it also means that the resulting contextual flag typically only then applies to that specific institution. It would be desirable if universities were able to share data on outreach programme participation, so that other universities could flag as contextually disadvantaged applicants who had participated in an outreach programme comparable to their own but delivered by another institution.

Many outreach programmes, including the Sutton Trust's own summer schools, which subsequently confer contextual flags for admissions purposes include academic eligibility criteria set at a high threshold, for example a minimum number of GCSEs at grades A* to B. The rationale behind these academic eligibility requirements is that a strong performance at GCSE is a good indicator of subsequent likelihood of achieving A-level grades at or close to the standard offers for courses at Sutton Trust 30 universities. However, setting the GCSE performance bar so high provides a barrier for disadvantaged students with the potential to do well at university but whose GCSE results are not quite as good. A more inclusive threshold could better achieve the goal of widening access and should support the greater use of contextual admissions in university decision-making. The Sutton Trust is currently reviewing academic eligibility criteria across all its programmes.

The use of contextual data to inform admissions decisions

A number of Sutton Trust 30 universities could improve the quality of the information they provide on their websites regarding how contextual data is used to inform admissions decisions. Of those which do

provide information about how contextual data is used, many signal that in practice this is left to the discretion of individual departments or individual admissions selectors. This means uncertainty for applicants as to whether their disadvantaged circumstances will or will not be taken into account, and if so what they can expect from the university as a result. It may also lead to inequitable treatment of essentially identical candidates if the university's decision about whether or not to act on contextual information is somewhat arbitrarily made. Best practice would involve detailed information provided to prospective students about exactly what actions they can expect the institution to take (for example, guaranteed prioritisation for an offer, with entry requirements reduced by a specified number of grades relative to the standard offer).

Not all ST30 universities reduce entry requirements for contextually disadvantaged applicants, and those that do are quite conservative in only reducing entry requirements by one or two grades for applicants who have not participated in a widening access programme – and as shown elsewhere in this report, the average is much less than that. This is problematic because even reduced entry requirements are challenging for the most disadvantaged students to achieve.

4. What can we learn from administrative data?

The previous section suggested that at least some Sutton Trust 30 universities are taking account of contextual data at some points in their admissions process. But only in a handful of cases are reductions in entry offers guaranteed to individuals meeting certain criteria; in many cases, the use of contextual data to inform the admissions process is discretionary. So how much of a difference is contextualisation making – or might it be making – to the goal of widening access to individuals from these institutions? This section uses administrative data to try to better understand what is happening on the ground.

Background

Figure 4.1 starts by showing the average A-level scores of individuals from different backgrounds attending the 25 Sutton Trust universities in England.[11] Specifically, it compares the average points equivalent of the top three A-level grades obtained by:

- students from neighbourhoods ranked in the bottom 40% in terms of higher education participation (in POLAR quintiles 1-2) vs. those from the top 60% of neighbourhoods;
- those who were and were not in receipt of free school meals at age 16;
- students whose parents did not go to university vs. those with at least one parent who went;
- those who attended one of the 40% lowest performing secondary schools (measured by the percentage of students attaining at least 5 A*-C grades at GCSE) vs. those who attended one of the 60% highest performing secondary schools.[12]

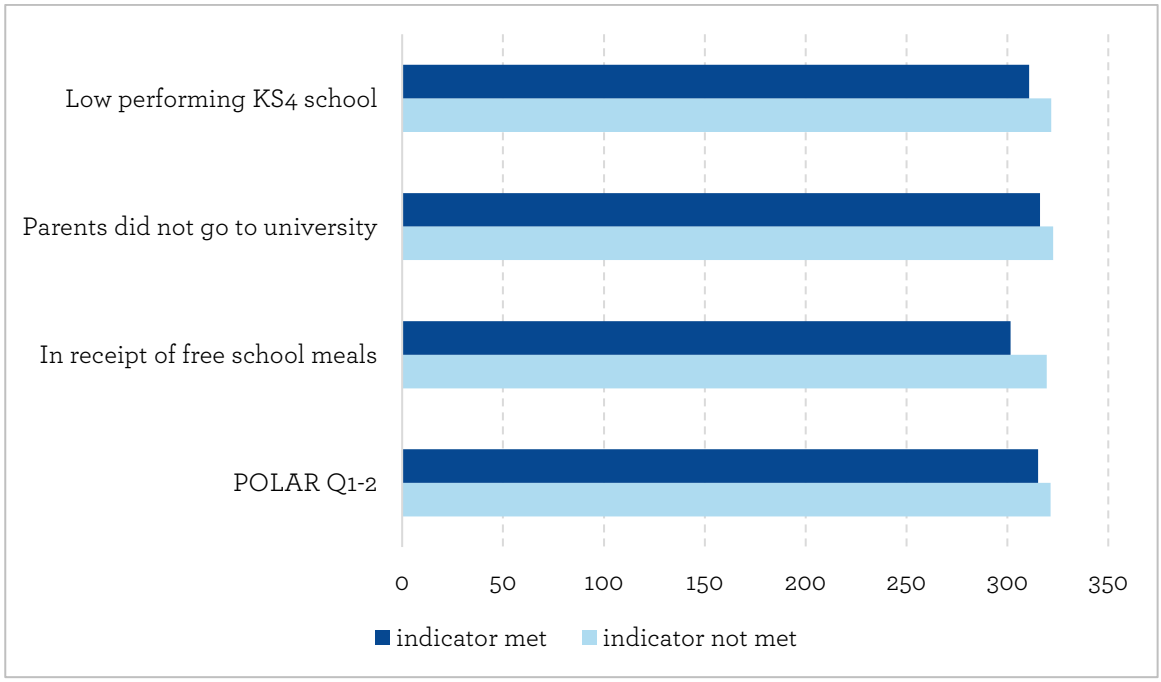
As outlined in the previous section, these are some examples of the types of indicators that universities use to contextualise their admissions process.

Figure 4.1 shows that the average number of A-level points obtained by students from each of these contextual backgrounds is lower than the average obtained by students who do not meet these criteria, but that the differences are small – less than the equivalent of one grade lower (20 points). For example, students from higher participation neighbourhoods arrive with an average of just over 320 points – equivalent to an A grade and two B grades – while the average amongst those from lower participation neighbourhoods is around 315 points, a difference equivalent to a quarter of a grade. The biggest difference is between students who were and were not in receipt of free school meals at age 16, but even between these groups the difference is less than a single grade on average.

It is also worth noting that while the average grades for individuals from non-contextual backgrounds are high, there is considerable variation. For example, while nearly 40% of those from higher participation neighbourhoods who attend an English ST30 university achieved at least three A grades, just over 20% entered with A-level points less than or equal to two B grades and a C grade.[13] This highlights that there is a wide distribution of achievement amongst students attending these universities, even if we focus on those from more advantaged backgrounds.[14]

[11] Figures A1-A4 in the Appendix show how these figures vary across each of the 25 English ST30 universities.
[12] Figures A5-A8 in the Appendix show, for each university, what percentage of students meet these criteria.
[13] This could reflect the fact that they have taken A-levels in combination with other subjects, the latter of which we do not observe in detail in our data.
[14] These figures are across all cohorts in our sample, that is, for those entering university between 2005 and 2013. The equivalent figures in 2013 – the latest year of data to which we have access – suggest that just under 50% enter with at least three A grades and 14% enter with less than or equal to two B grades and a C grade.

Figure 4.1: average A-level points amongst English domiciled students joining an English ST30 university between 2004-05 and 2012-13, by contextual indicators



Do lower grades for poorer students necessarily imply successful contextualisation?

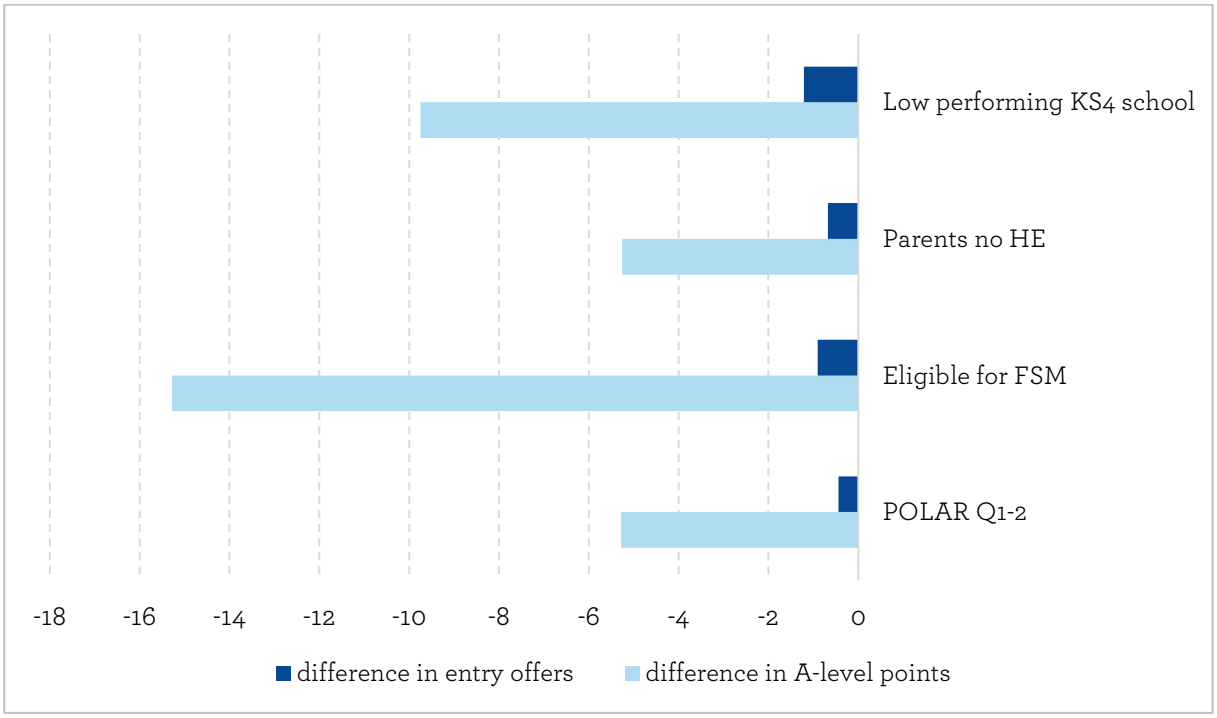
The key question, of course, is whether lower average A-level grades – even the small differences we see – necessarily indicate that universities are successfully contextualising their admissions process. The short answer is that they do not. There are a number of reasons why those from contextual backgrounds could have lower average A-level grades than their more advantaged counterparts in the absence of contextualisation. This could be the case if, for example, poorer students are admitted to study courses with lower entry requirements. Or they could be admitted to the same courses, but be less likely to exceed the entry offer than those from richer backgrounds. Or, of course, contextualisation could be the reason, with those meeting contextual criteria more likely to be admitted with grades below the standard entry offer.

To understand which of these potential explanations may be the most likely, we need to identify the standard offers made to students from non-contextual backgrounds for each course. The way in which we do this is summarised in the methods section. While, as we discussed there, we are only able to estimate offers for around half of all courses in our data, the difference in average A-level points between individuals from different backgrounds who attend these courses (see Figure 4.2) is very similar to that across all courses (illustrated by the gaps between the bars in Figure 4.1), so this analysis should hopefully still enable us to provide some insight regarding the potential sources of the gaps across all courses at English ST30 universities.

First, we want to rule out that the reason students from contextual backgrounds have lower average A-level scores is simply because they attend courses with systematically lower entry requirements than their peers from non-contextual backgrounds. Figure 4.2 compares the average differences in A-level points between those from contextual and non-contextual backgrounds with the average differences in offers we estimate were made to non-contextual students on these courses. Negative numbers indicate that the A-level points or course offers for students from contextual backgrounds are lower than those for students from non-contextual backgrounds. If most or all of the gap in average A-level scores between those from different

backgrounds could be explained by differences in course choice or access, then we would expect to see the two bars being a very similar size.

Figure 4.2: differences in average A-level points and average offers received by English domiciled students joining an English ST30 institution between 2004-05 and 2012-13, by contextual indicators



What we see instead from Figure 4.2 is that differences in offers for the courses attended by individuals from different backgrounds are very small indeed – less than one tenth of an A-level grade, on average – and hence can explain only a small proportion of the gap in average A-level points achieved by those from contextual and non-contextual backgrounds at English ST30 institutions. Indeed, if we take the ratio between the differences in average A-level points and the differences in average offers across all courses offered by each institution in every year, order them from smallest to largest, and look at the institution-year combination exactly in the middle (at the median), we find that just 8% of the difference in A-level points between those from high and low participation neighbourhoods – and no more than 14% across any of the contextual indicators considered – can be explained by differences in the courses attended by those from different backgrounds. It seems we must look elsewhere to understand the majority of the differences in A-level points between those from richer and poorer backgrounds.

Are poorer students admitted to university with grades below the standard entry offer, or do they just exceed the offer by a smaller margin than richer students?

Next we investigate how the A-level points of students who meet contextual criteria compare to the standard offers made to individuals on each course. If the average A-level scores of those from contextual backgrounds exceed the average offers we estimate were made to those from non-contextual backgrounds on the same course, then this suggests that, on average, all students are likely to exceed the grades required to be admitted to the course, but that richer students are more likely to do so to a greater extent than poorer students. This does not suggest the presence of contextualisation. If, on the other hand, the average A-level scores of those from contextual backgrounds are lower than the average offers made to students from non-contextual backgrounds, then this might suggest that less advantaged students have systematically received offers for (and/or been admitted with) grades lower than the standard offer, which might be indicative of some form of contextualisation.

Figure 4.3 compares the average A-level scores of students from low participation neighbourhoods with the average offers made across all courses for which we can estimate them, and aggregates the results across each institution. Positive numbers mean that the average A-level scores of students from low participation neighbourhoods exceed the offers we estimate were made to students from high participation neighbourhoods (and hence that these institutions are less likely to be contextualising in this particular way), while negative numbers mean that average A-level scores are below the standard offers made (and hence are more likely to be indicative of some form of contextualisation).

Figure 4.3: difference between estimated offer made to students from high participation neighbourhoods and average A-level scores of students from low participation neighbourhoods

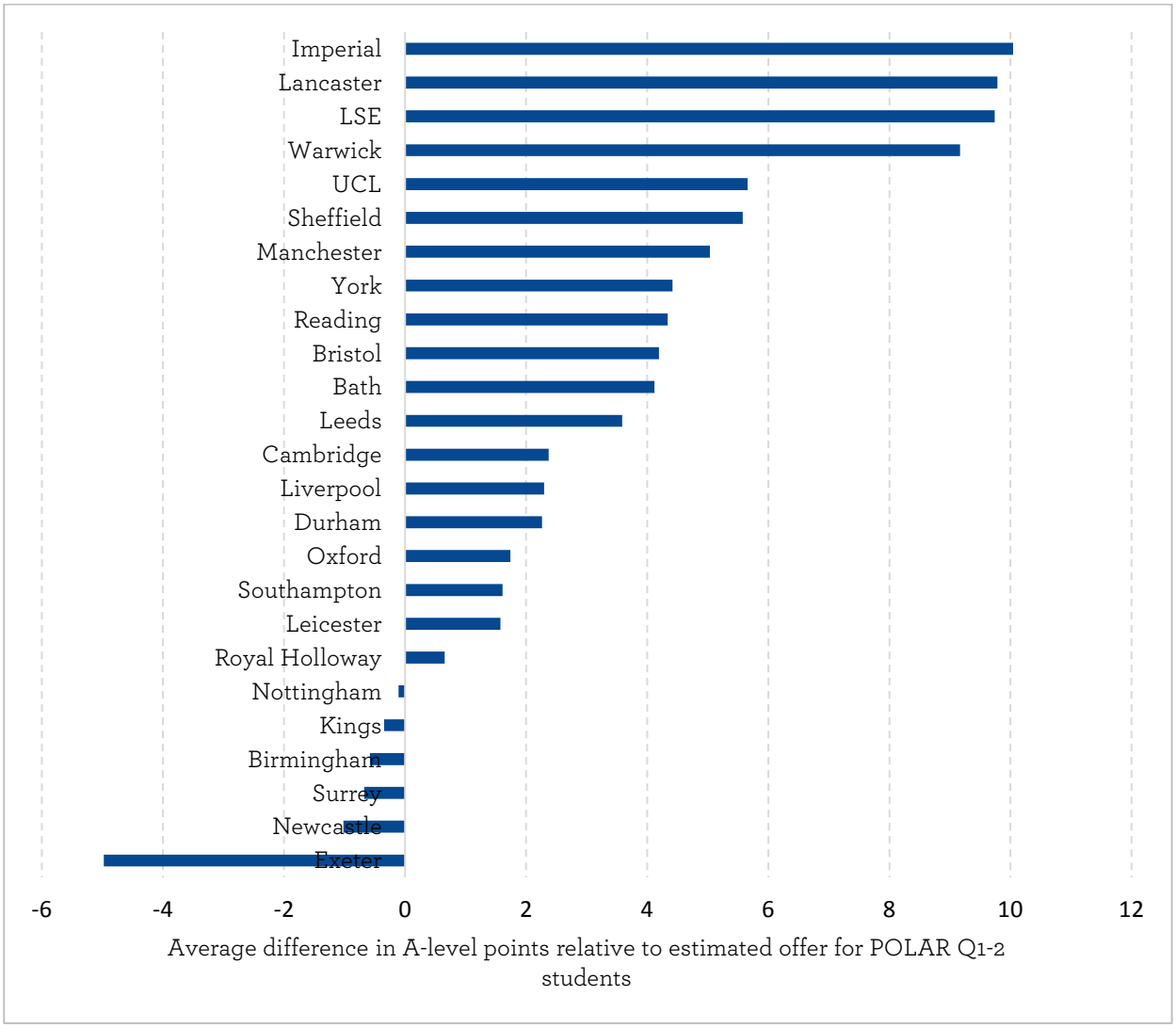


Figure 4.3 shows that average A-level scores for students from low participation neighbourhoods exceed average offers at the majority of English ST30 institutions, but are below them in a small number of cases. On the basis of this evidence alone, this suggests that it is the latter universities who are more likely to be contextualising their offers or acceptances. It should be noted, however, that the differences in all cases are small – less than half an A-level grade, on average. Such small differences suggest that it is relatively unlikely that these institutions are offering systematic reductions in entry tariffs for students from lower participation neighbourhoods, or at least that the majority of students admitted from those backgrounds

did not require lower offers in order to get in. This suggests there remains significant scope for further contextualisation on the basis of A-level entry offers at the majority of institutions.

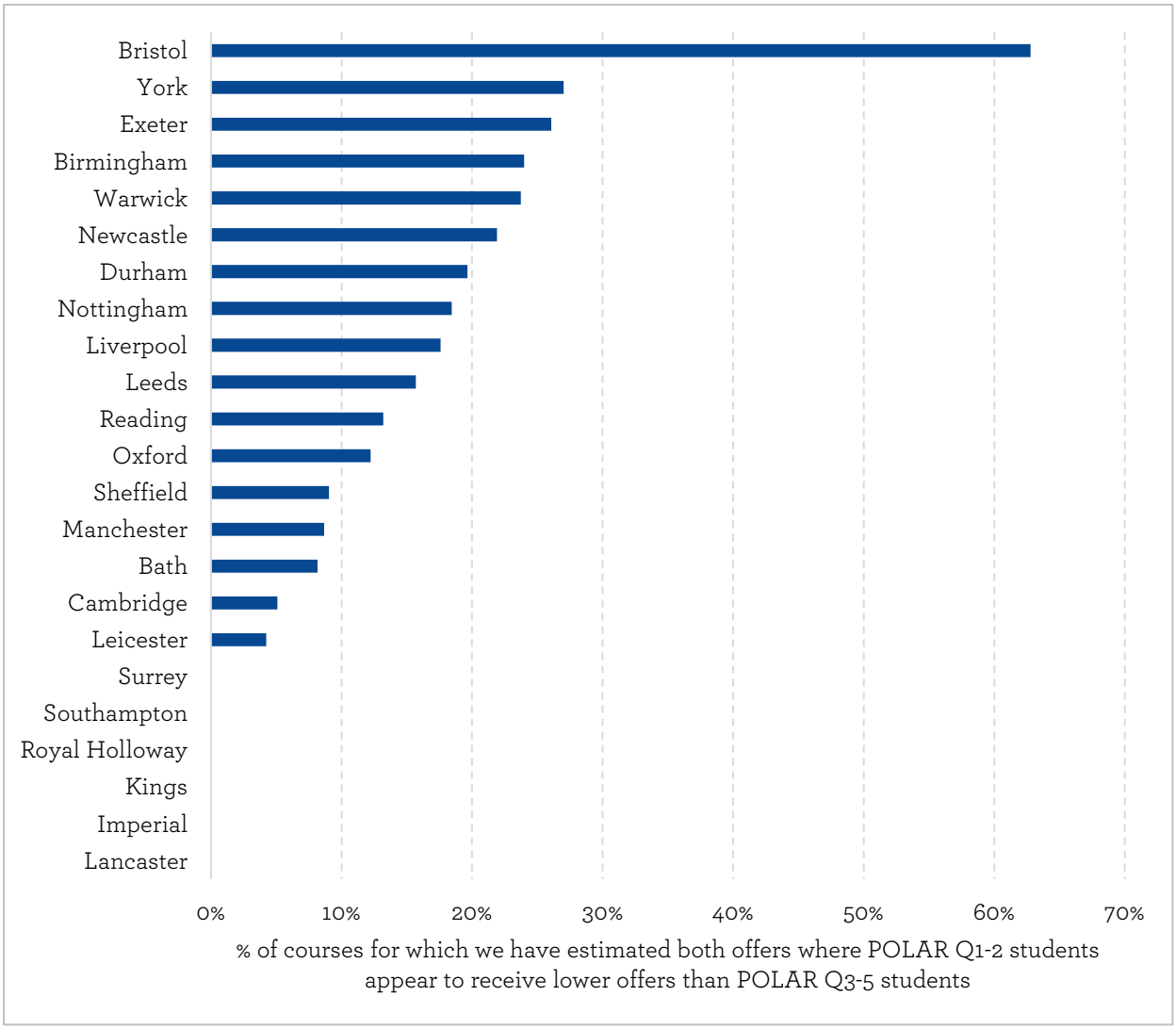
This is clearly only one of the ways through which contextualisation might manifest itself, however. An alternative way of trying to identify universities that practice contextual admissions is to estimate the offers made to students from contextual backgrounds directly, in the same way as we did for students from non-contextual backgrounds, and compare the two sets of offers. If the offers for students from contextual backgrounds are estimated to be lower than the offers for students from non-contextual backgrounds on the same course, then this might also be evidence of contextualisation. As outlined in the methodology section, we can only do this for a small number of courses (with larger numbers of these students), but this analysis provides another piece of complementary evidence regarding the extent of contextualisation at English ST30 universities.

The results of this exercise are shown in Figure 4.4, which presents the percentage of students at each university who attend a course which appears to contextualise – where the offer for students from low participation neighbourhoods is estimated to be below that for students from high participation neighbourhoods.[15] This analysis suggests that there are a number of universities for which this never seems to be the case (at least for the courses for which we can estimate both offers over the period in question). These would seem to be the least likely to contextualise on the basis of this measure. The University of Bristol – which we know to have a comprehensive contextualisation process in place – is a clear outlier on this method, with over 60% of the courses for which we can estimate both offers suggesting that those from low participation neighbourhoods receive lower offers than those from high participation neighbourhoods. Though it should be noted that we can only estimate both offers for five courses at this university, so the results should be taken as indicative only. Other universities scoring relatively highly on this measure may also be more likely to contextualise in some way (and the measures for these universities are based on higher numbers of courses in each case).

Comparing the universities that are more likely to contextualise on the basis of our estimates in Figures 4.3 and 4.4 highlights some institutions that may be relatively more likely to be (successfully) contextualising on the basis of A-level scores, as they score well on both measures. Exeter, Birmingham and Newcastle fall into this set of universities. There are also universities that, at least on the basis of these specific measures and over the period in question, do not appear to be (successfully) engaging in contextualisation that is discernible when comparing students using the POLAR indicator, including Imperial College London and Lancaster.

[15] The London School of Economics and University College London are missing from this figure because we were unable to estimate the offers made to students from POLAR Q1-2 backgrounds for any courses at these institutions. The number of courses for which we were able to estimate offers for both POLAR Q3-5 and POLAR Q1-2 students at each institution are shown in Appendix Figure A9. The numbers in Figure 4.4 are similar if we estimate the percentage of courses (rather than the percentage of students attending these courses) for which estimated offers are lower for those from low participation neighbourhoods than for those from high participation neighbourhoods.

Figure 4.4: percentage of courses for which offers made to students from low participation neighbourhoods appear lower than those made to students from high participation neighbourhoods



Are we setting students up to fail?

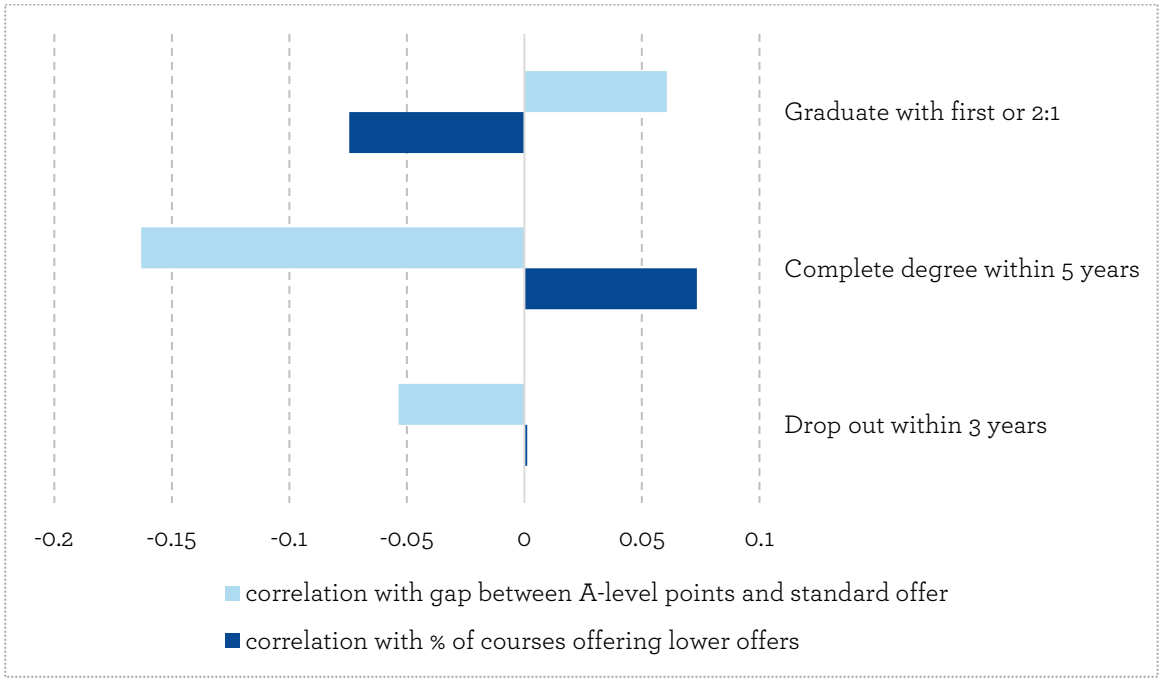
While it is possible that successful contextualisation may have become more apparent in more recent years of data, this provides some suggestive evidence on the extent to which universities' intentions regarding contextualisation appear to be bearing fruit in terms of the admissions of students from contextual backgrounds with lower offers than their more advantaged peers.

Of course, one concern that is often raised when discussing the possibility of using contextual data to inform the admissions process is that it risks "setting students up to fail" – that is, leading to worse outcomes for those students than for students on the same course with higher A-level grades. Existing evidence certainly suggests that students from poorer backgrounds tend to have worse degree outcomes, on average, than their richer peers, even amongst those with the same attainment.[16] But is there any evidence that universities who appear to be more likely to contextualise are also more likely to see higher dropout rates, lower degree completion rates and lower percentages of students getting firsts or 2:1s? We find little evidence of this, at least using the two potential measures of contextualisation described above.

[16] See, for example, Crawford, C. (2014), Socio-economic differences in university outcomes in the UK: drop-out, degree completion and degree class, IFS Working Paper W14/31, Institute for Fiscal Studies, London, UK, and the references cited therein.

Figure 4.5 presents correlation coefficients showing the relationship between the degree of contextualisation evident from Figures 4.3 and 4.4 with average degree outcomes for students on these courses. If contextualisation were adversely affecting degree outcomes, then we would expect to see a negative correlation between the percentage of courses on which universities appear to offer lower entry grades to students from low participation neighbourhoods and dropout rates, and a positive correlation with degree completion and degree class. By contrast, we would expect to see a positive correlation between the difference in A-level grades of students from low participation neighbourhoods and the standard offer and dropout rates, and a negative correlation between this gap and degree completion and degree class results.

Figure 4.5: correlation between our indicators of contextualisation and degree outcomes



This is not what we see in Figure 4.5, which shows relatively low correlation coefficients in all cases, and signs which often go the opposite way to what we would expect if contextualisation were adversely affecting degree outcomes. While not definitive evidence that contextualisation "works", it certainly provides some indication that, with the right support, there is no reason why students from disadvantaged backgrounds cannot succeed at ST30 institutions, even if admitted with slightly lower A-level grades than their more advantaged peers.

How far could contextualisation go in widening access to ST30 universities?

If we were confident that admitting more students from contextual backgrounds with slightly lower grades could be successfully managed, allowing them to progress and perform well in their degrees, then how fruitful a strategy could contextualisation be in terms of widening access to ST30 universities? For how many students might a one or two grade reduction in A-level entry offers make a difference to the type of institution they could attend?

To undertake such a calculation, we must identify all prospective students from a contextual background, not just those who go on to college or university. As such we must focus on a characteristic observed in secondary school, rather than something that is only observed for university students (such as POLAR quintile in our data). An obvious candidate in our data is recorded eligibility for free school meals at age 16 (in Year 11). As entry requirements vary from university course to university course, we must also make

a judgement regarding a minimum set of grades that are "required" in order to attend a ST30 university. For this we use the benchmark of ABB, as our data suggests that 85% of students attending ST30 institutions were admitted onto courses that required at least this level of attainment over the period of our data.

If all students who were eligible for free school meals at age 16 and went on to achieve grades of at least BBC at A-level could now be admitted to ST30 institutions – if the "minimum" requirement of ABB were to be lowered by two grades – then, each year, about 750 more previously FSM-eligible students with grades of BBB or BBC who do not currently attend a ST30 institution could potentially go. If all these students were admitted, this would mean a 50% increase in the number of such FSM-eligible students admitted to our leading universities (from around 1,500 to around 2,250 each year).

5. Foundation year provision for contextually disadvantaged learners

In addition to contextualised approaches to admission, a number of ST30 universities also provide foundation year programmes which may serve as an alternative route into undergraduate programmes for prospective students from contextually disadvantaged backgrounds. Foundation year programmes function as intensive preparatory courses which aim to bridge a credential gap and serve as an alternative means of recognising and measuring academic readiness for progression to undergraduate study. We focus here on foundation year programmes which constitute Year 0 of an undergraduate degree programme, the successful completion of which guarantees progression to Year 1 and beyond of an undergraduate degree course at the same institution.[17]

Fifteen of the Sutton Trust universities offer this type of alternative access and of those, provision is distributed across disciplines but particularly linked to science and engineering programmes. At seven universities, some or all of the foundation year programmes on offer explicitly identify contextually disadvantaged school leavers as a target market. At ten universities, some programmes do not explicitly mention contextually disadvantaged students in relation to their foundation year provision, but their applicability to contextually disadvantaged learners is implied by the lower entry requirements for these courses in comparison to direct entry to Year 1. At a number of universities, some or all foundation year provision is aimed specifically at mature students.

Foundation year programmes explicitly targeted at contextually disadvantaged learners are provided at the universities of Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford and Warwick, while St Andrews provides contextually disadvantaged learners with a supported pathway through Year 1 of some of its degree programmes.

- At Leeds University, foundation years are available in a range of disciplines mostly delivered by the Lifelong Learning Centre. Following admission to Year 0 students may be eligible for financial support. The centre administers admissions policy for foundation years and successful students are admitted as full members of the university. A significant grade reduction of up to six grades is applied to applicants with indicators of social disadvantage. More information about foundation year provision at Leeds is given in Case Study 3 below.

- Foundation years are available at Leicester, but the use of contextual indicators as eligibility criteria is only clearly stated for the foundation year in medicine.

- At Manchester, contextual indicators are flagged up only on its MPharm with foundation year.

- At Newcastle, contextually identified applicants count as an eligible group (via Newcastle's PARTNERS scheme) for all degrees with a foundation year except mathematical studies.

- Nottingham makes specific mention of contextually identified applicants for foundation years in arts and humanities.

- Lady Margaret Hall (LMH) is the only provider of a foundation year specifically for contextually disadvantaged applicants at Oxford.

[17] We do not consider here other types of 'foundation' provision, such as international foundation years designed specifically to help overseas students gain access to UK degree programmes, and foundation degree programmes which lead to a self-contained and portable qualification.

Case Study 3: Foundation year provision at Leeds University

The **Extended Degree** scheme at the University of Leeds is a foundation year programme targeted at contextually disadvantaged students. It is delivered by the university's Lifelong Learning Centre and guarantees progression to year one of a bachelor's degree programme at the university upon successful completion of negotiated learning contract. Learners become full students of the university at the beginning of their foundation year and are not required to make a further application. Learners are eligible for financial support throughout their studies. This approach is fully endorsed by the university as both valid and valuable.

Eligibility criteria: Applicants for extended degrees must meet at least one of the following eligibility criteria:

- evidence of social disadvantage as indicated by a home postcode in the lowest two quintiles of the POLAR3 or IMD measures
- attendance at a low-performing school
- time spent in local authority care.

Entry requirements: Applicants meeting the eligibility criteria for admission to a programme on the extended degree scheme are admitted on a standard offer of, for example, CCC at A Level for Business or CDD for Science. This does not represent an adjusted offer but is the stated requirement for the extended degree programme. The lower tariff required at the point of entry to the university is attributable to the university's lifelong learning centre, rather than to the University of Leeds, and so does not impact negatively on institutional comparative performance data at subject-level. The contextual offer made under the terms of the extended degree scheme represents a gateway where prior success and achievement is looked at much more broadly than academic staff are able to within the typical admissions framework. Applicants' potential is evaluated using a range of methods such as the completion of a piece of work or an interview. Applicants are also actively recruited through clearing. The extended degree scheme complements the university's Access to Leeds (A2L) widening participation programme, which enables the application of a two grade reduction to the typical programme offer. Extended degrees admit learners to the university with a significantly greater attainment gap than is possible through A2L and addresses this through provision of intensive, carefully scaffolded learning during the foundation year.

Design and delivery: The Year 0 curriculum is built in collaboration with academic staff from corresponding programmes in Year 1. Year 0 does not replicate A-level modes of study but instead constitutes the first year of being a university student. Learning is highly scaffolded. Within the university, the lifelong learning centre has a history of working with adult learners and of structuring educational provision around "constituencies of learners" rather than academic disciplines. This expertise has extended to delivery of foundation years that specifically focus on the needs of learners from disadvantaged settings.

Progression: The extended degree scheme guarantees progression to Year 1 of an undergraduate degree programme conditional on the student achieving the level of performance required for their chosen degree. This can be expressed in terms of overall grade at foundation year but may also include specific attainment thresholds, for example in mathematics for progression to some science degree programmes. These requirements are set out in a learning contract negotiated with the lifelong learning centre upon admission and checked throughout the year in tutorials to enable students to see whether they are on track and, if not, to reflect on their next steps with the support of academic staff. The foundation year is designed specifically to enable students to develop the skills and attributes required for success as a Leeds undergraduate and to give them a head start in comparison with those progressing directly from school or college when they commence the first year of their honours degree.

Some 80-85% of students admitted to the extended degree scheme progress to their chosen programme at the University of Leeds. A further 5-10% progress to a degree programme at another institution offering programmes not available at the University of Leeds but better suited to their strengths.

Challenges: The challenges include applying widening participation criteria to adult learners or learners for whom data isn't available (for this constituency of learner, the lifelong learning centre convenes a panel to evaluate the context of the applicant). In addition, for some progression routes the number of places available is small yet the pool of potential applicants is very high.

- Warwick clearly flags the eligibility of contextually disadvantaged applicants for its foundation years in management & accounting and in finance.

- St Andrews does not operate a Year 0 degree programme, but does provide *Gateway* programmes in three subject areas - computer science, medicine, and physics and astronomy – which provide additional support to contextually disadvantaged learners throughout Year 1 of the degree programme.

- Foundation year programmes not explicitly targeted at, but inclusive of, contextually disadvantaged learners (school leavers and mature students) are offered at the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Southampton and York.

- Birmingham offers foundation years "with" chemical engineering, chemistry, engineering and physical sciences for EU/UK students. It is designed to be "relevant to the needs of modern industry and to produce students ready to move onto any of our undergraduate degree programmes" and "for students who have not achieved the normal subjects and grades required to enter first year". A one or two grade reduction in standard entry grades (A-Levels) is applied for these foundation years. The university accepts other qualifications (IB, BTEC etc.) as evidence of potential. A full fee is charged for approximately 16-18 hours of lectures and classes/labs per week plus possible timetabled extra support classes for some students. Successful completion allows automatic transfer into Year 1 of the degree programme.

- Bristol offers a foundation year in arts and humanities as a "new route into higher education". Age is not a criterion and neither is "what you've done in the past", but "what you have the potential to achieve in the future". The programme is at least 25 hours a week including two days spent in lectures, classes and independent study at the university. This programme is aimed primarily at local students who live in the Bristol-Bath area. Study skills and a broad introduction to arts and humanities characterise the year's programme. Applications are made directly to the university, not through UCAS. The fee for the course is reduced by 50% of the standard (£4,650). There are no formal entry requirements for the course apart from motivation and "the potential to succeed in university study beyond it". Where a high number of applications are received, priority may be given to: applicants from low-performing schools, low socio-economic status households (groups 4-7) and applicants without prior experience of higher education and/or who do not already hold a qualification at QCA level 3 (for example, A Levels or an Access to HE Diploma). If the course is completed satisfactorily students will be guaranteed a place on an undergraduate degree within the university's faculty of arts

and humanities.[18] Bristol cannot guarantee progression to first choice of degree but students will be offered a satisfactory alternative. If the criteria for progression haven't been met, a pathway certificate in arts and humanities will be awarded.

- Cardiff offers preliminary or foundation courses for EU/UK nationals, mainly in the sciences. Most of these programmes are integrated and use "with preliminary year" as a course identifier. Only one programme is "with a foundation year" (engineering). These programmes are intended to enable students to acquire knowledge of subjects not studied previously which are a requirement for their degree programme of choice.

- Leicester also offers foundation years for targeted programmes. Leicester's admissions policy states that the university's policies "embrace its commitment to equal opportunities and any conditions for entry to a programme will only be imposed if justifiable on academic grounds". Targeted groups are those "who wish to study a STEM subject such as engineering, but don't have the traditional entry requirements". A one grade reduction in one subject is applied in these circumstances, such as 3Bs rather than ABB.

- Liverpool offers a range of foundation year programmes for all constituencies of learner.

- At Manchester, foundation years for EU/UK students are available "if you do not have the appropriate subject background for direct entry to first year, or you have not studied the appropriate subjects in the required depth". The foundation year is integrated with specific degree pathways in the sciences. The admissions policy also states that the foundation year may be offered as an option to "applicants who have missed the conditions of their offer". There is a suggestion that if there is "evidence that you have underperformed due to exceptional circumstances beyond your control" the university will give consideration to attainment that is less than the typical (ABB) for the foundation year. Entry requirements for the biosciences range from 3As to 1A and 2Bs. The offer in engineering is more generous and stands at 2Bs and 1C.

- At Newcastle, integrated foundation years in the sciences are available for UK applicants but arts and humanities and social sciences don't appear as foundation options.

- Most of Nottingham's courses can be accessed through a foundation year with reduced standard entry grades and alternative qualifications. Contextually identified applicants for an arts and humanities foundation year are clearly targeted, but the targeted groups are less clear for foundation years in engineering and physical sciences or science. For these foundation programmes there is a "flexible admissions policy" that allows the university to "offer lower than advertised, depending on their [applicant's] personal and educational circumstances". Standard fees are charged.

- A large number of programmes with foundation years are on offer at Southampton. Successful completion can lead to a place on a number of integrated degree disciplines.

- York runs a number of integrated degrees *'with'* foundation year or *'extended'* degree pathways in science and social science programmes. Fee waivers are in place for the foundation year for applicants impacted by socioeconomic disadvantage at the level of the household. Once admitted to the full degree programme at York, students may be eligible for bursary awards.

[18] Overall average of 60% or above/overall average of 50% or above and at least one unit mark of 60% or above/an overall average of 40% or above subject to a progression review meeting with relevant academic staff.

Several ST30 universities offer foundation years targeted exclusively at learners returning to education after a break, including Durham, Liverpool, Sheffield and York.

- At Durham, foundation year programmes are available in the form of integrated programmes for all departments and most subjects. Standard fees are charged for the foundation year. These programmes are aimed at 'learner-returners' from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, at HE certificate-level both in DLL [Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics] and in other departments.

- Liverpool offers one foundation year programme "intended for adult learners or undergraduates who wish to take up biology but do not have the appropriate subject background." The foundation year further promises "to make you an expert in one particular field with the ability to cross discipline boundaries, a highly attractive prospect to employers".

- At Sheffield, foundation pathways are available for adult returners through the University's Department for Lifelong Learning. It is not clear whether these may be available to younger learners. Some individual departments also offer degrees *with* foundation years. These appear to be mainly science pathways and are intended for students who "for whatever reason, need additional preparation or additional science subjects before going on to benefit from an Engineering or Science degree". It makes clear that the foundation year is not necessarily "right for you if you have tried but failed to meet the normal entry requirements for level one". The science and engineering foundation year is available to applicants who are young high attainers in the wrong subjects as well as those with non-standard qualifications, mature applicants and international applicants. If applicants have completed a lifelong learning foundation programme this is used as contextual data.

- At York, a foundation year programme exists in combined studies. If progression thresholds are not met an alternative progression route will be supported e.g. to the Certificate in Higher Education. The programme is targeted at mature applicants who can demonstrate that prior attainment was "affected by issues of a personal, social or domestic nature". The additional entry requirements for the Certificate in Higher Education includes "clear potential to succeed evidenced by a combination of work, life and prior educational experiences which together demonstrate communication and analytical skills that can be successfully transferred to an academic context" as well as "a considered awareness of the challenges of studying at HE certificate-level both in DLL and in other departments".

Implications for the provision of foundation year programmes

Foundation year provision would appear to be a promising means of widening access to undergraduate degree programmes; supported learning in Year 0 may help bridge a wider attainment gap than would otherwise be possible via contextual admissions programmes that do not involve a significant degree of supported progression into Year 1. There is scope for greater provision of foundation year programmes at ST30 universities.

These universities could do more to make it clearer to contextually disadvantaged learners and those who support them that foundation year programmes offer an alternative route into higher education for those from challenging circumstances who might not otherwise meet the entry requirements for Year 1.

6. Conclusion

While the university access gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers has narrowed somewhat in recent years, the gap at the most selective universities remains stubbornly wide. This report has provided new evidence on the use of contextualised admissions amongst a group of highly selective universities in the UK today, and offered some insights into the differences greater use of contextual data might make to the numbers of disadvantaged students at these universities.

Analysis of information available on university websites indicates that a majority of these universities use contextual data to inform their admissions processes, but that they use a variety of individual-, area- and school -level indicators, in different ways, and with many leaving decisions on whether and how the data is used to the discretion of individual departments. Just four universities indicated that all contextually flagged applicants would be guaranteed a reduced grade offer, for example, with a further nine guaranteeing a reduced grade offer conditional on successful completion of a widening access programme or summer school. The fact that the eligibility criteria for these access programmes often require students to demonstrate strong prior attainment, however, creates an additional barrier to access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The effectiveness of attempts to widen access through greater use of contextual data is also hampered by the lack of information made available to applicants with regard to the indicators that are used, and what meeting the criteria would mean for them. A substantial number of universities provided little or no information, with some others indicating only that such applications would be given additional consideration, without further details. This lack of transparency is a barrier to access, as potentially eligible students – often those with fewer networks and least access to information – might be unaware that they would benefit from contextual admissions processes.

Indeed, this might help to explain why we found that the A-level grades of students from a range of contextual backgrounds are only marginally lower than those from non-contextual backgrounds at the same universities. In just six of the 25 English ST30 universities did students from low participation neighbourhoods have lower average A-level results than the standard offer, suggesting the use of contextualisation, but even amongst these universities the grades of students from poorer backgrounds are not substantially lower than offers – less than half an A-level grade on average.

This suggests that there remains significant scope for greater use of contextual data amongst selective universities in the UK. While concerns have been expressed that it risks "setting students up to fail" by admitting them with lower grades, our analysis finds little evidence that leading universities that appear to practise greater contextualisation see significantly higher dropout rates, lower degree completion rates, or lower degree class results than universities where the use of contextualisation appears to be lower. Of course, the data does not reveal what additional support may have been provided to students admitted under contextual schemes, but it does suggest that there is no reason why students from contextual backgrounds admitted with lower grades cannot succeed at top universities with the right support.

This could make a substantial difference to the numbers of students from contextual backgrounds who study at elite universities. We estimate that reducing entry offers by two grades could potentially increase the number of students eligible for free school meals who are admitted to Sutton Trust 30 universities by around 50% (from around 1,500 to around 2,250 each year). Other ways to widen access might also prove successful. For example, at around only half of the universities we considered that operated

foundation year programmes were they targeted specifically at those from disadvantaged backgrounds, leaving scope to improve their role in widening access.

In summary, while the majority of Sutton Trust 30 universities report that they use contextual data to inform their admissions processes, in practice, the way in which they do so and the extent to which it encourages more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply and be admitted to these universities appears limited. Greater transparency in the use of contextual data and a greater willingness to extend its scope in future could both contribute to improving the access and progression of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at elite universities, crucial to addressing the UK's social mobility problem.

Appendix

Figure A1: difference in average A-level points between English-domiciled students from one of the 40% lowest participation neighbourhoods vs. one of the 60% highest participation neighbourhoods who joined an English ST30 university between 2004-05 and 2012-13

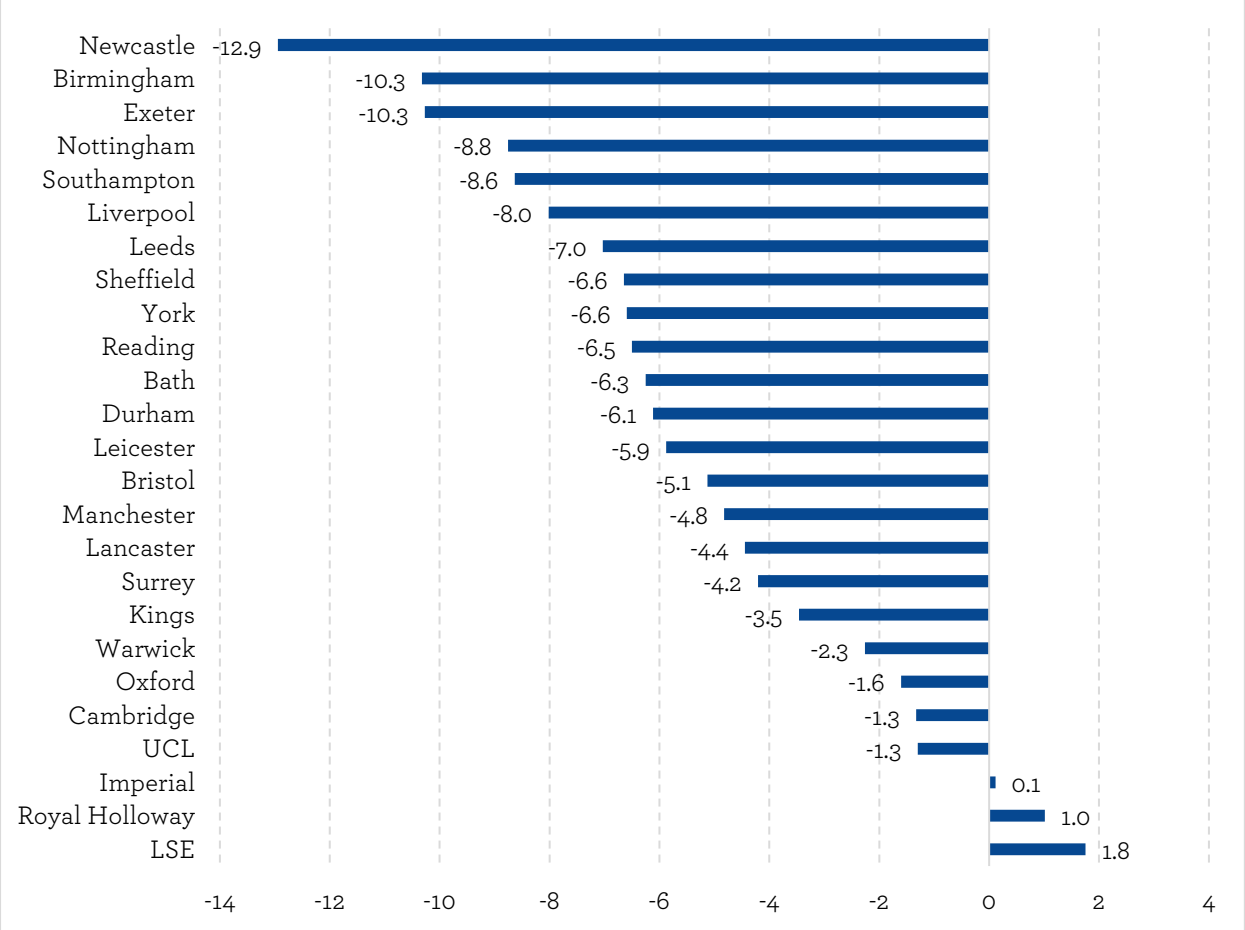


Figure A2: difference in average A-level points between English-domiciled students who were and were not in receipt of free school meals at age 16

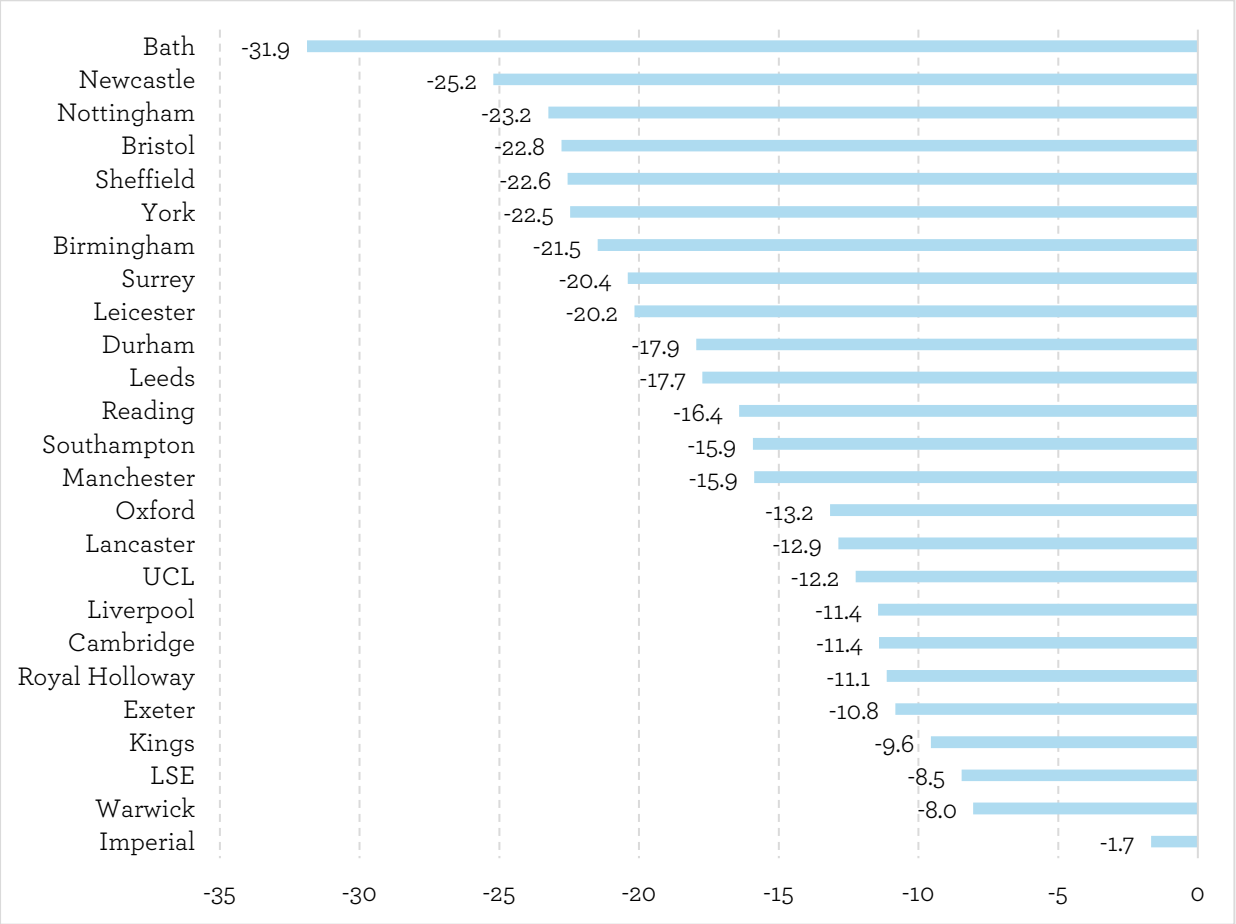


Figure A3: difference in average A-level points between English-domiciled students whose parents did not go to university vs. those with at least one parent who did go to university

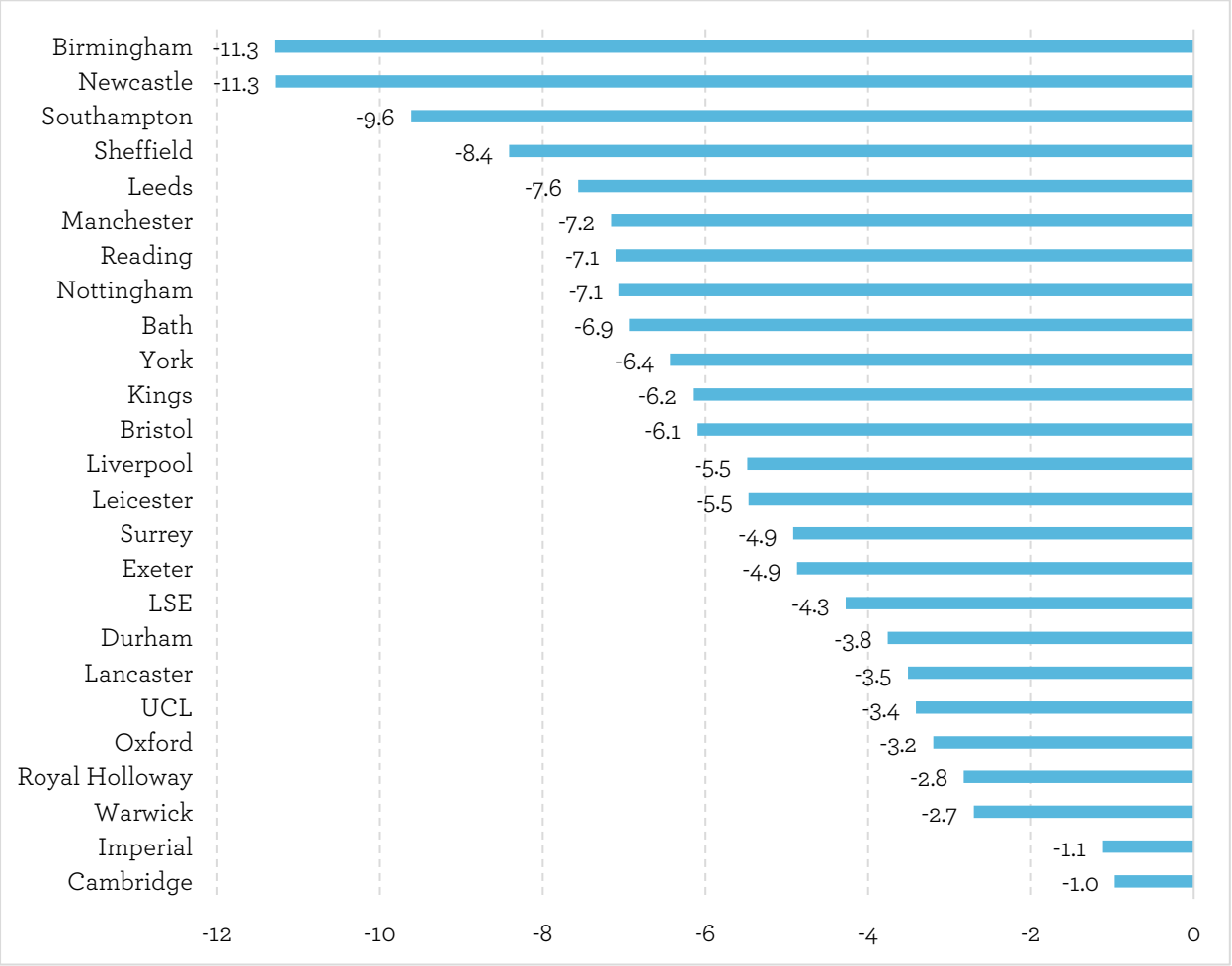


Figure A4: Difference in average A-level points between English-domiciled students who took their GCSEs in a low performing secondary school (bottom 40% in terms of % getting 5 A*-C grades at GCSE) vs. those who took their GCSEs in a high performing school

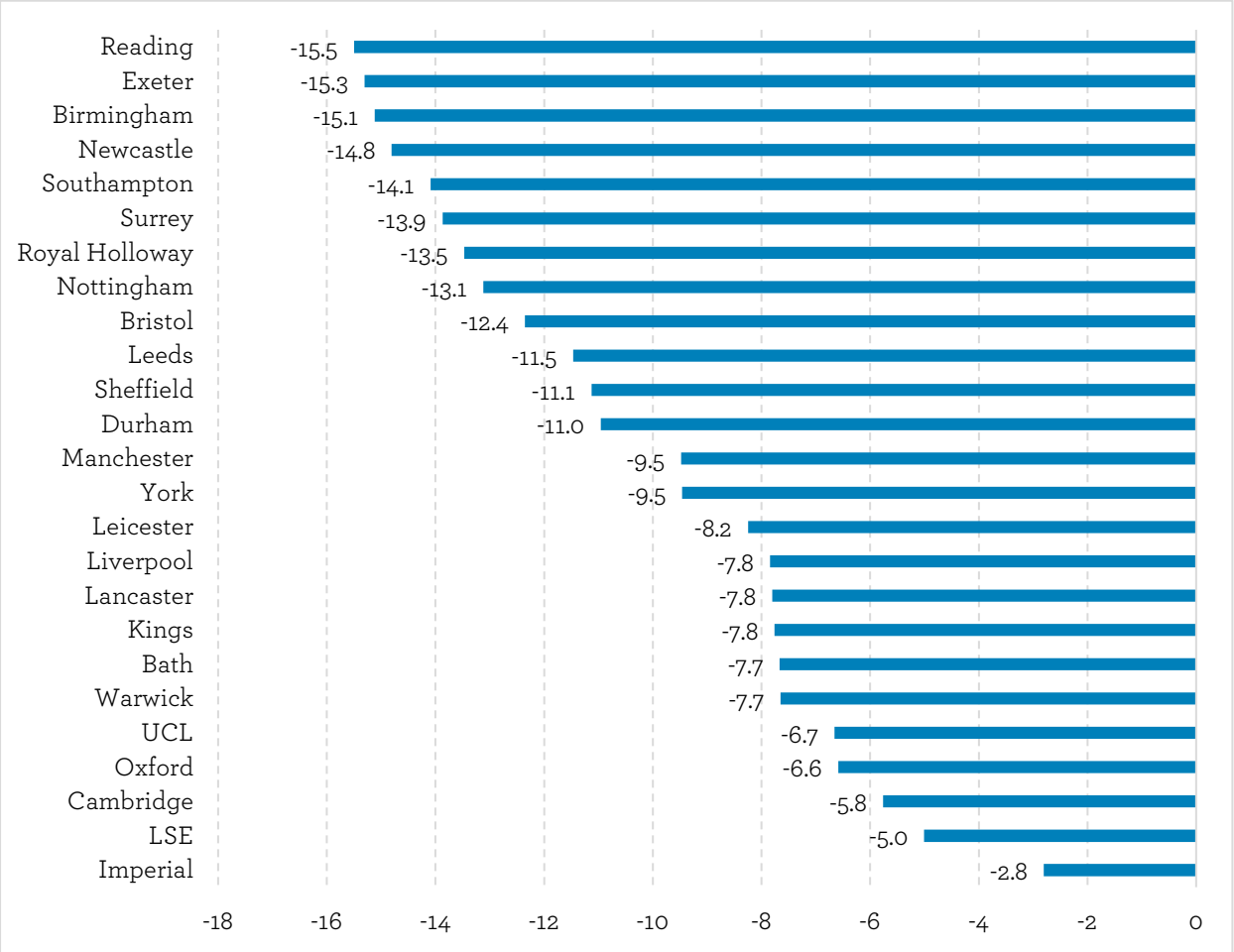
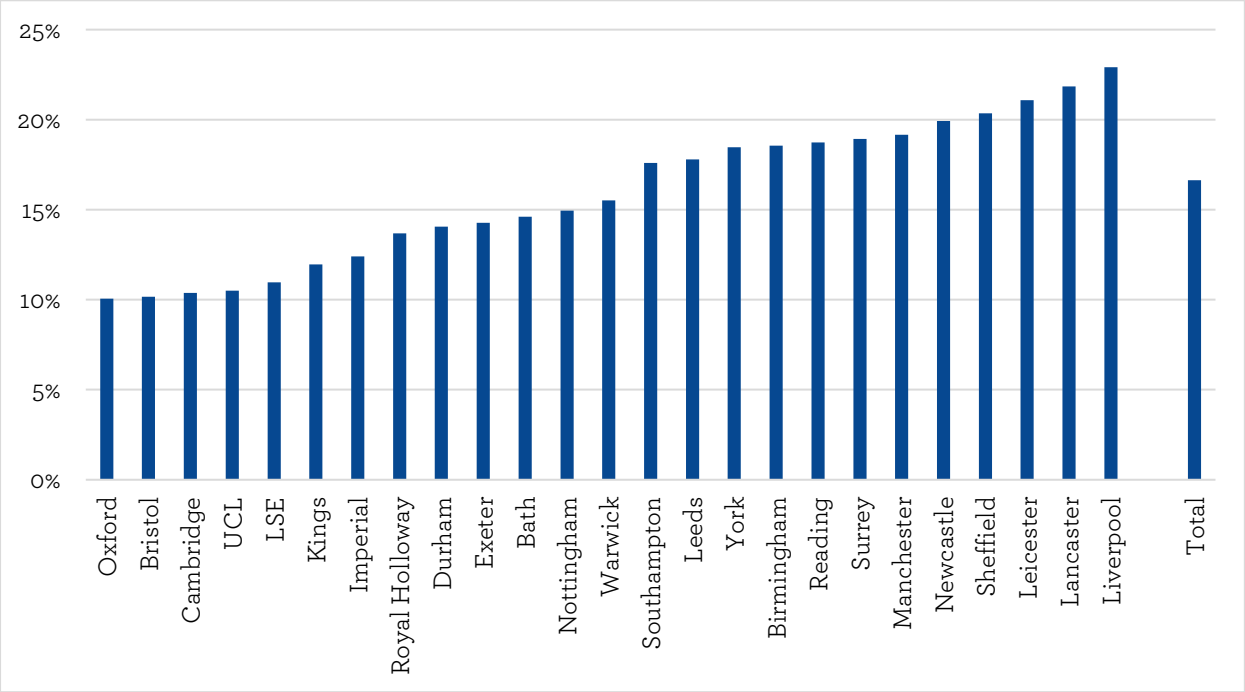
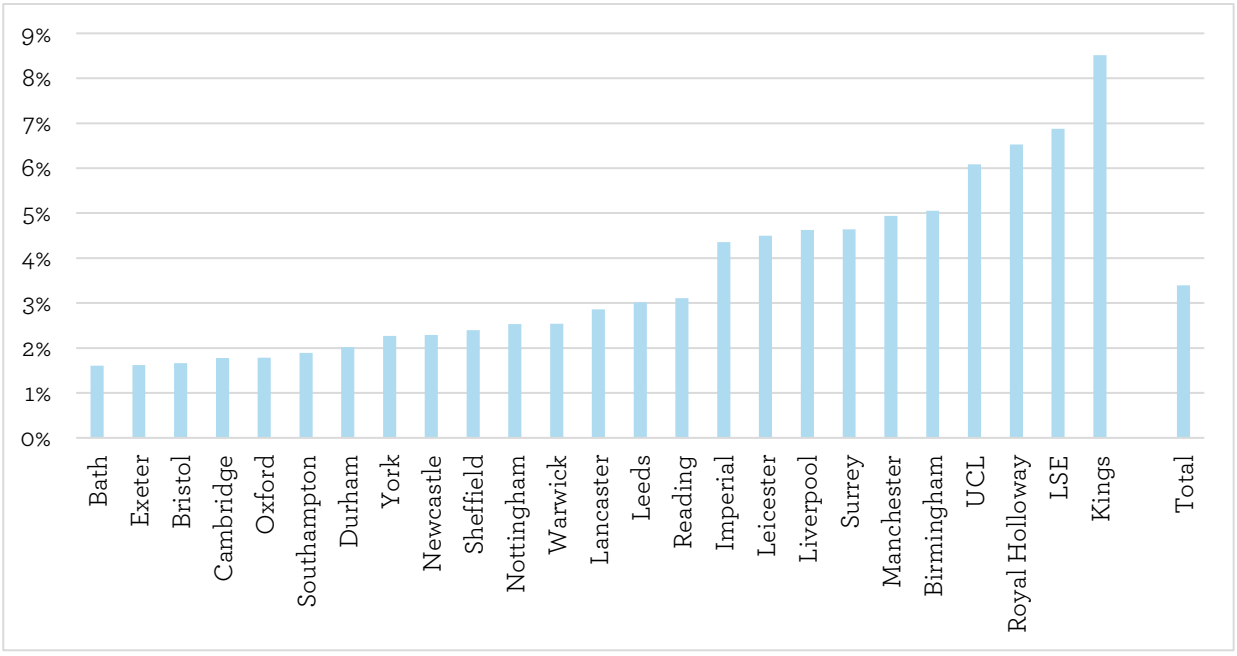


Figure A5: % of English domiciled students joining an English ST30 university between 2004-05 and 2012-13 who come from a low participation neighbourhood (POLAR quintile 1 or 2)



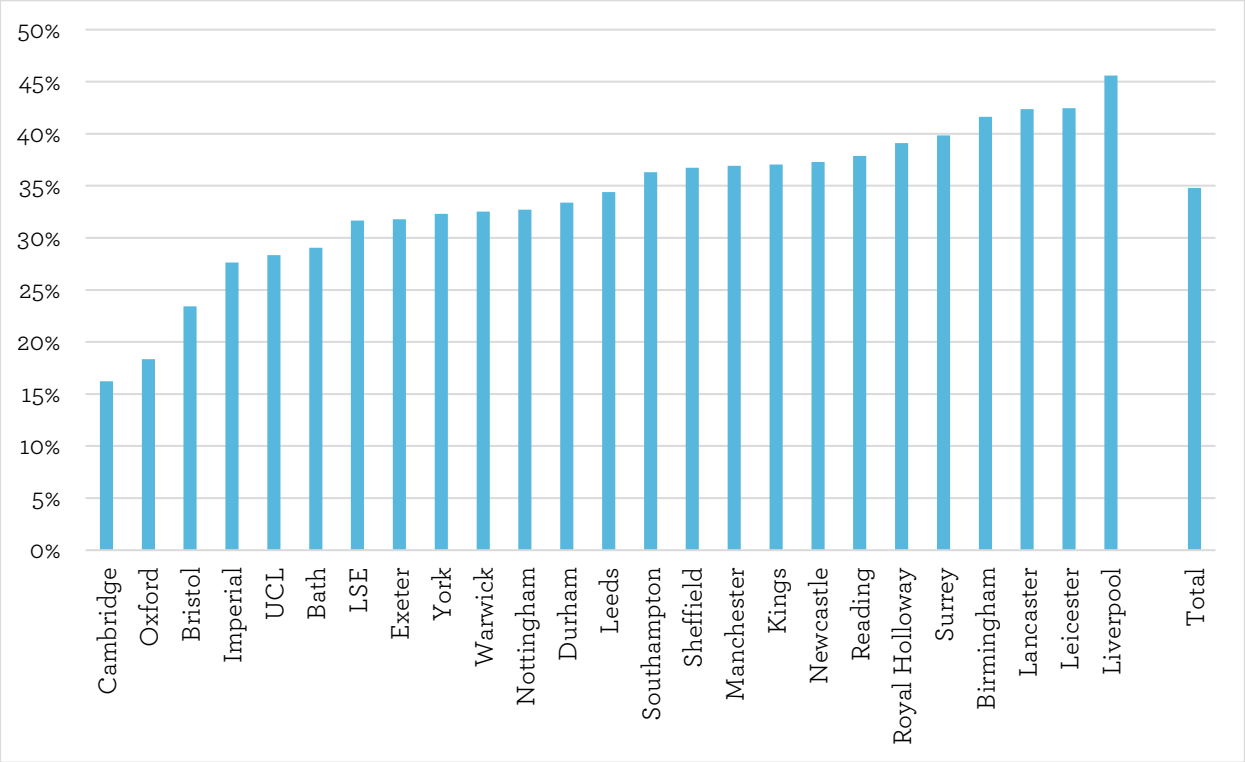
Note: this is the percentage among all university students (with non-missing information). 99% of students in our data have this information recorded.

Figure A6: % of English domiciled students joining an English ST30 university between 2004-05 and 2012-13 who were in receipt of free school meals at age 16



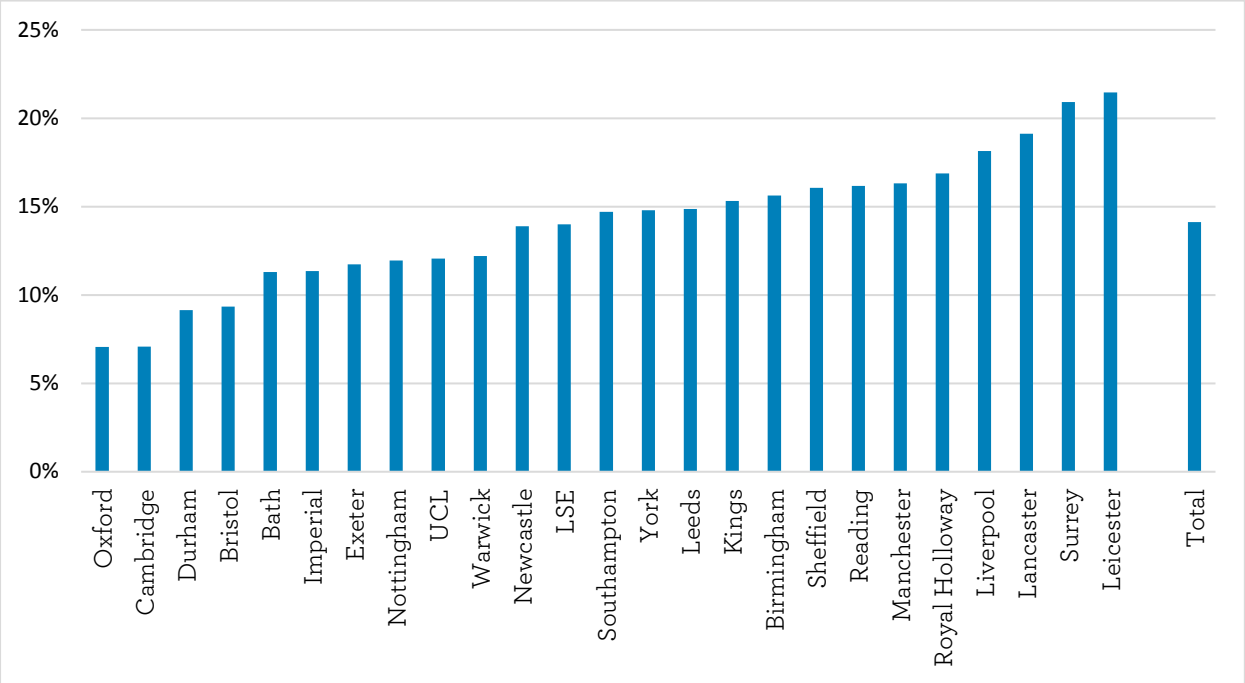
Note: this is the percentage among all students who took their GCSEs in a state school in England (with non-missing information). 74% of students in our data have this information recorded.

Figure A7: % of English domiciled students joining an English ST30 university between 2004-05 and 2012-13 who report that neither of their parents went to university



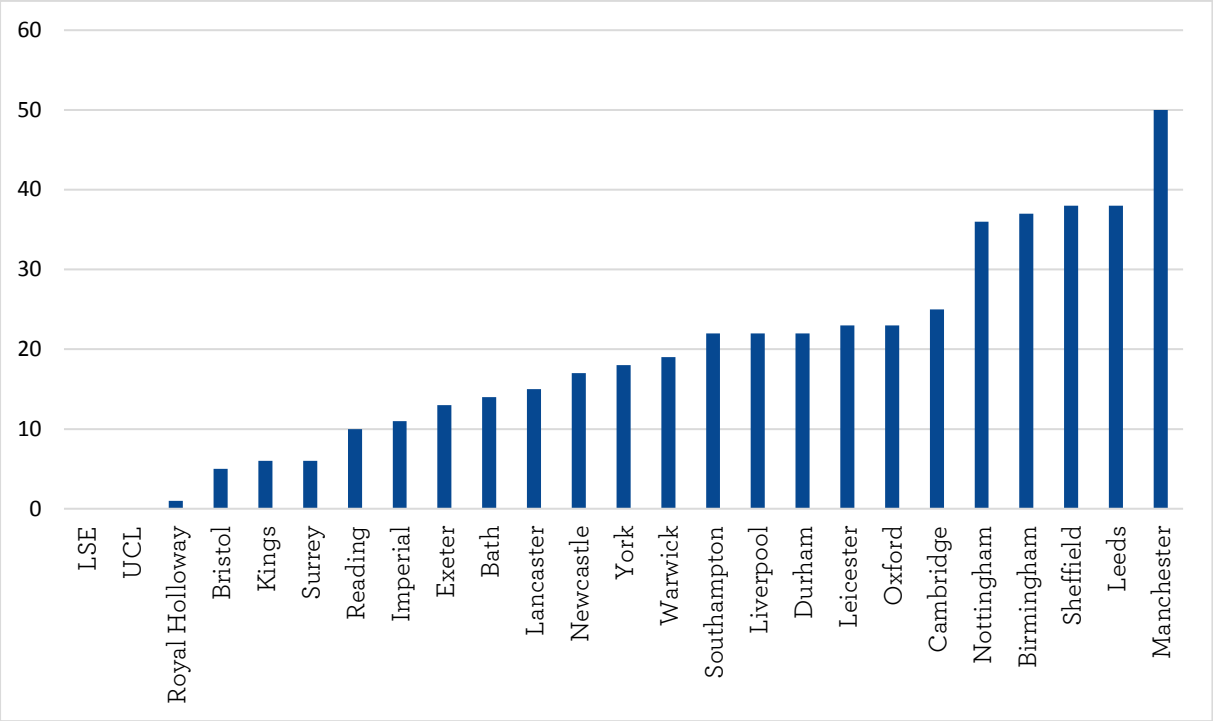
Note: this is the percentage among all university students (with non-missing information). 65% of students in our data have this information recorded.

Figure A8: % of English domiciled students joining an English ST30 university between 2004-05 and 2012-13 who took their GCSEs in a school in the bottom 40% in terms of % getting 5 A*-C grades.



Note: this is the percentage among all university students in our sample (with non-missing information). 99% of students in our data have this information recorded.

Figure A9: number of courses for which we can estimate offers made to students from both low and high participation neighbourhoods, by institution



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