



Access to Higher Education: The London Challenge

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Executive Summary

- **Finding fair and accurate measures of the access performance of London HEIs**
Existing methods of data collection may be under-estimating the extent to which London HEIs admit learners from under-represented groups leading to the level of work that these HEIs undertake in this area not being fully captured. As with student funding there may be a case for a different weighted method for assessing access progress in London.
- **Understanding participation and success by minority ethnic groups**
London is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world. Our understanding of how participation in HE differs amongst different ethnic groups and the challenges they face here does not equate with the nature of the city. New research and activity is urgently needed to address inequalities in access and success by ethnic group in London.
- **Developing a student lifecycle approach to widening access for London**
There is an increasing focus at national level in England not just on access to HE, but success in and progression out of HE for learners from widening access backgrounds. While large numbers of graduates are employed in London, there is also evidence that the London factor may also bring with it graduate unemployment. Collaborative work involving London HEIs needs to focus more on success and progression as well as 'access to' HE.
- **Addressing the 'postcode progression lottery' for widening access learners in London**
The last report, Social Mobility in London: the role of Higher Education, highlighted the differing HE progression rates by both local authority and school in London for learners from lower socio economic groups. Further research has added greater depth to our knowledge regarding the geography of participation in the capital showing major inconsistencies in progression for learners from particular groups in different areas. Statutory agencies in the capital need to take ownership of this problem.
- **Maximising the access investment in London**
London HEIs are investing close to £180m in access to HE work in 2014-15. It also has the largest investment in addressing educational disadvantage of any region in the country via the pupil premium. The concentration of major graduate employers in the city also combines with a number of active and entrepreneurial third sector organisations to create a diverse 'access ecosystem' in the capital. There is the potential to explore the benefits that could accrue from these resources and activity interacting more closely together, and bringing the access to HE agenda closer to other educational progression routes for young people. There should be a collective effort to match the investment of £180m by HE to create a Social Mobility Fund for London.

1. Introduction

The educational attainment and progression gap between London and the rest of the country is becoming increasingly well documented (APPG 2013, Greaves et al 2014). In terms of access to higher education this gap is significant and growing (HEFCE 2013). The previous report in this series showed how over the last 10 years, the numbers going to HE in London from both low participation neighbourhoods and claiming free school meals was much higher in the capital than elsewhere (Atherton 2013). Higher education participation amongst those from London is over 10% higher than the rest of the country.

However, this report showed that these differences at the level of the region masked substantial disparities within London where HE access is concerned. It also flagged up a number of areas where there were issues to be addressed where access to HE, and the nature of HE itself in the capital are concerned. The impressive progress made in London, combines with some broader questions regarding the merits of HE progression in the context of the English fee regime, to mean that is a real need to articulate the access challenge for London. There will be both a general election and a Mayoral election in the next 2 years. There will also be new investment in access to higher education activity nationally via the £20m+ Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded networks of collaborative outreach initiative due to begin in 2014–15. Furthermore, the cap on student numbers is to be lifted from 2015. The case for increasing access to higher education in London, aspect of the challenges here need to be clear if the opportunities presented by these developments are to be realised.

This report will focus on a fivefold access to higher education challenge for London in the coming years. It also tries to identify specific actions that different stakeholders could take individually and together to address these challenges. There may well be more aspects to this challenge, but the evidence to support the role that these 5 play in shaping who goes to HE and who benefits in London is strong and crucially in each area there are gaps in our understanding that need to be addressed.

2. Finding fair and accurate measures of the access performance of London HEIs

While the main focus where inequalities in participation in HE are concerned is on socio-economic background, there are differing ways of measuring such background where HE access is concerned. Neither is socio-economic background the only area where inequalities in HE participation occur. Data is collected on participation by ethnicity, disability and age. Assembling an accurate picture of relative institutional performance in this context is difficult and as yet, little work has been done which attempts to combine the various elements of under-representation into one overall measure. Doing this would require a judgement regarding the relative importance of different elements of under-representation. It would also entail judgements regarding the importance of entry to HE vs exit from HE. As discussed further below, recent work has attempted to compare HEIs by outcomes for learners from under-represented groups.

The differential nature of how socio-economic progression is measured has a particular resonance where London HEIs are concerned. Table 1 looks at learners attending London institutions. This is as opposed to those domiciled in the capital, which is the usual focus here. It shows London HEIs compare very differently to the rest of the country where geographical background of learners, socio-economic classification by occupation and eligibility for full grant support are concerned.

Table 1: HE participation at HEIs by region and measure of lower socio-economic group 2011–12

Region	Number from NS–SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7	Number from low participation neighbourhoods	Numbers of students eligible for full state support
East Midlands	6130	2715	32211
East	3805	1385	21510
Greater London	10360	2040	69394
North East	3650	1975	18237
North West	9440	4915	52486
South East	7905	2975	39827
South West	5335	2205	30076
West Midlands	6440	2600	31181
Yorkshire and Humberside	8020	3860	38520
England	61085	24670	333444

Data from HESA (2013) and OFFA (2014)

To a significant extent the pattern in Table 1 does mirror the pattern where geographical background and occupation are concerned in respect of progression by domicile. This presumably the extent to which learners from lower socio-economic groups in London also study in London. What it does reflect clearly is that there is a real issue here where gaining an accurate picture where HE participation by those from lower socio economic groups are concerned. The dominant form of measurement of HE progression for HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access is POLAR — yet it may seriously underestimate the contribution that London HEIs are making to access to HE by lower socio economic group. The POLAR combines data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency with that from the child benefit records to calculate participation at the level of the census ward (HEFCE 2013).

The relatively high levels of overall HE participation by making most of London mid to high participation areas may be masking the work that London HEIs are doing in attracting individuals to HE who by any other measure would constitute an economically under-represented group. This may have further implications for the measurement of access by outcome. As Table 1 shows, on the POLAR measure there are only just over 3000 learners from 'lower socio-economic areas' at London HEIs, while data on the income background of individual learners shows that actually over 70,000 learners are eligible for the full grant from HEFCE!

There has been an increased interest recently in the importance of including, in both the policy and practice where widening access is concerned, not just access to but outcomes from HE for learners from under-represented groups. The National Strategy for Access and Success published in 2014 states that:

'To maximise impact and effectiveness, it is crucial that all higher education providers and stakeholders take a broad view of widening participation encompassing a student's entire lifecycle: preparing for and entering higher education, graduating successfully, and progressing to employment or postgraduate study.'

In this vein, ex Vice Chancellor of Liverpool John Moores University Michael Brown wrote a pamphlet for the Centre Forum think tank in 2014 proposing a new Social Mobility Index (Brown 2014). His index uses POLAR data in combination with Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DELHE) data to construct a measure of 'social mobility' that reflects the social background of an institutions intake and the extent to which students obtain graduate employment 6 months after graduation. It is weighted to reflect the success an institution has in recruiting larger numbers of students from low participation backgrounds, and also to reward professional as opposed to just employment outcomes.

The Index has been criticised as focusing on outcomes very early in post HE life, not accounting for post-graduate progression and it also takes a narrow view of the benefits of HE study. Nevertheless, it represents perhaps the most rigorous contribution so far to the debate surrounding access, social mobility and outcomes. HEIs in London fair relatively poorly in this Index. There are only 3 London institutions in the top 25 ranked HEIs, and there are 15 in the bottom 25.

Brown acknowledges the limitations with the Index, but he argues with some justification that he is working with the best data available. The lack of publicly available data on HE progression by the other areas of under representation hampers any potential broadening of such an index. However, it is necessary to do so. While it certainly advances the debate surrounding how access performance should be measured, it should in no way define it. At the moment it is not reflecting the contribution that London HEIs are making to 'social mobility'.

There is a pressing need for a more comprehensive measure of progress in HE access both amongst HEIs and as an overall group. The recent travails surrounding the future of the student opportunity allocation in early 2014 were another example of the threats to funding in this area of work emanating from a perceived lack of evidence and narrative regarding return on investment. London represents the ideal environment in which to pilot the development of more comprehensive measures of progress and impact in access to HE. There is a critical mass of HEIs in London and they are drawn from across the different kinds of HE provider in England. London's relative success in attracting HE participants also makes it ideally suited to look for solutions to a problem that the rest of the country could face where the measurement of participation by neighbourhood is concerned. If they also start to increase the overall numbers going onto HE, the HE providers may also find themselves drawing from a diminishing number of low participation areas and perversely see a decline in their 'access performance'. However, before we reach this point it is essential that the differences in London are recognized where access to HE is concerned.

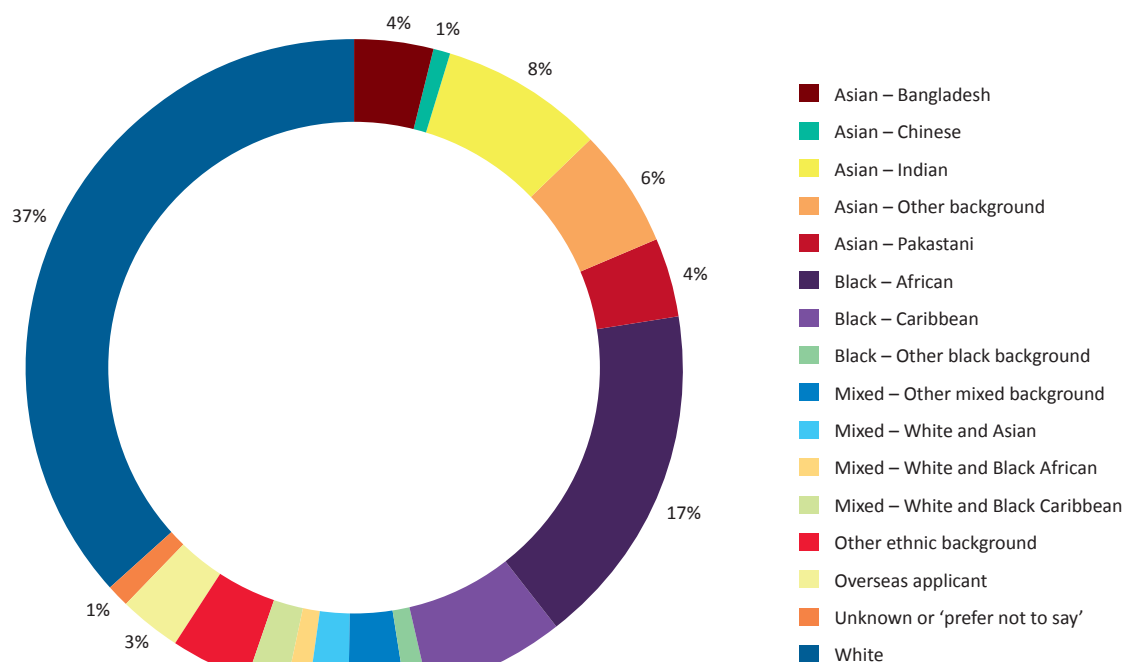
Recommendation

As with student funding a 'London Access weighting' is developed to reflect more accurately the work that London HEIs are doing to further the widening access agenda and the challenges they face in doing this. This weighting should then be used to apportion any funding for access work more fairly.

3. Understanding participation and success by minority ethnic groups

Our first report highlighted the extent of HE participation by non-white ethnic groups amongst in London. Table 2 is reproduced below:

Table 2: Applications to higher education institutions from London by ethnicity 2010



Source: UCAS admissions data

However, the categories used in the diagram below mask the diversity amongst ethnic groups. Establishing the extent and size of different ethnic groups in London exactly is a difficult if not impossible task. The census only goes so far in telling us about ethnic diversity. There are headline figures of importance — for example the last census showed that the majority of those resident in London were from non-white British groups (ONS 2012). Following on from this it is not surprising that in each of the categories of non-white British ethnic group, London has the largest population e.g. in terms of Indian, Black Caribbean groups etc. However, what needs to be understood better are the differences *within* these varying categorisations. An article in the Guardian in 2005 claimed that there were over 50 non-indigenous communities in the capital with over 10,000 members — although it is hard to verify this figure (Benedictus 2005). Putting a more detailed picture together of the ethnic composition of London requires drawing from a range of sources and then assessing the value of different 'metrics' for diversity, although none would be perfect (GLA Intelligence Unit 2013). These include country of birth (clearly does not include second generation people), reported identity in terms of country of affinity, passport held and languages spoken. The final one may be particularly interesting where education is concerned.

Research by Von Ahn et al in 2010 stated that:

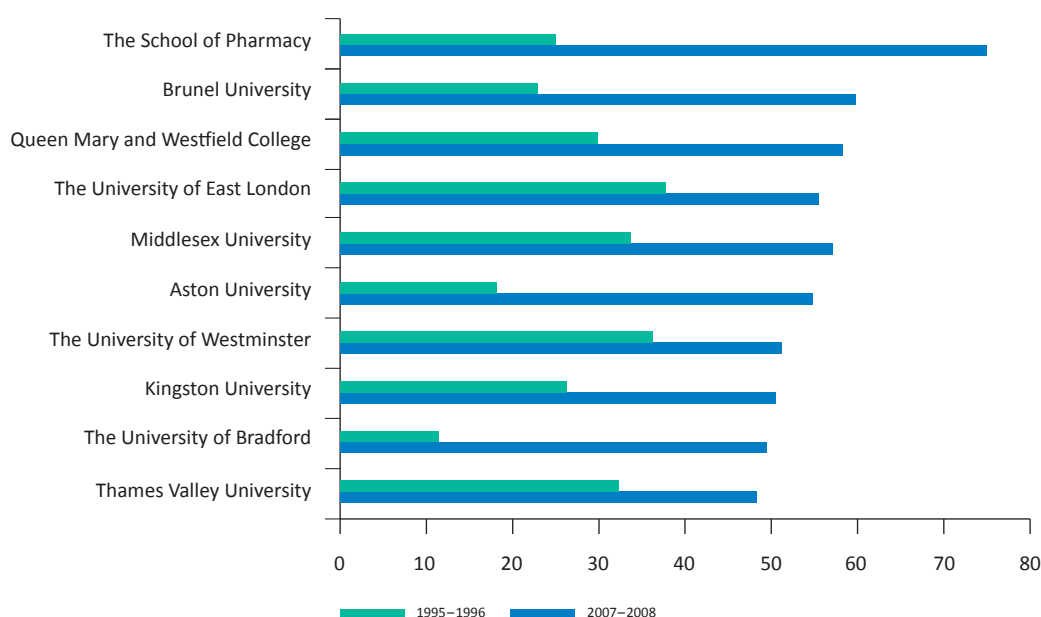
‘Over 300 languages are spoken by London pupils, around 60% of London pupils are English speakers however, there are over 40 languages spoken by more than 1,000 pupils’.

Von Ahn (2010:1)

Although the evidence here is patchy, the educational performance of these different ethnic groups appears very contrasting. For example the work of Strand et al (2007) looking at the performance of Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish pupils showed that the latter groups were achieving considerably below the national average while in the 2000s there had been significant improvements for Bangladeshi pupils.

Given the concentration of non-white British learners in London HEIs the issue of access to higher education and ethnicity is very much a London one. Table 3 below shows how London HEIs educate far more non-white British learners than the rest of the country.

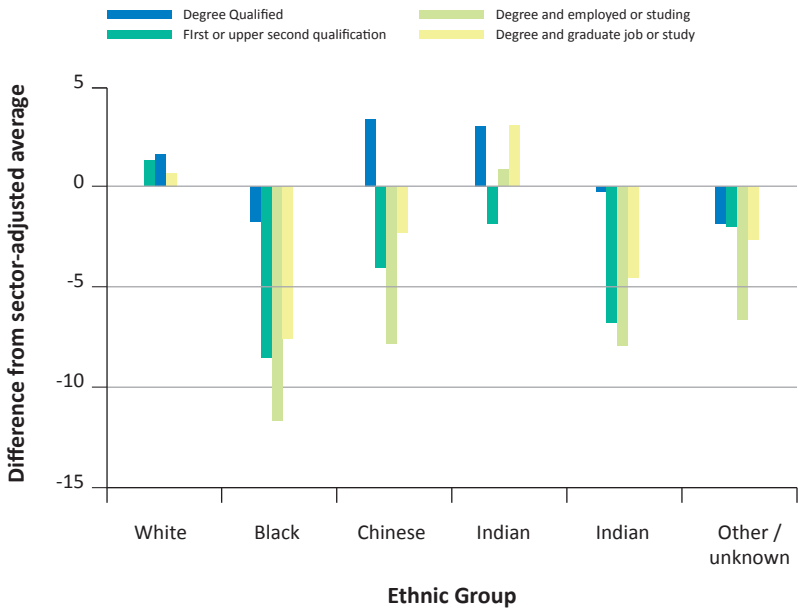
Table 3: Higher Education Institutions in England with the largest numbers of learners from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds



Race for Opportunity (2010:7)

The evidence also shows that learners from particular ethnic backgrounds are not achieving at the level they should be doing in HE in England. Table 4 below is taken from the National Strategy for Student Access and Success. It shows that after controlling for type of institution attended and prior attainment, black students for example are significantly below the sector average where obtaining a degree and being employed are concerned.

Table 4: Attainment and progression outcomes by ethnic group relative to the national average



BIS (2014:48)

Given what the evidence that does exist shows us regarding educational attainment, it can be reasonably hypothesised that there are ethnic groups in London who may have low levels of HE participation and this is not being addressed in policy or practice. The knowledge base where the relationship between HE progression, success, the structural barriers faced and the cultural values of different ethnic groups is concerned is under-developed. We do not know for example how the three groups in Strand’s study – Turkish, Somali and Bangladeshi students and their communities – view HE and the challenges that these students face in HE, never mind the range of other groups speaking the 300 languages in schools in London. Nor do we know how it relates to the problems of under-performance whilst in HE described above, or the extent to which these issues are ones that require London specific solutions.

The challenges we do know about captured by Table 4 from HEFCE above, will not be addressed until this understanding improves and it has to happen in London given the percentage of such learners who are from London and are educated in the city.

Recommendation

London HEIs work together to initiate and deliver significant new research to better understand the access and success challenges of learners from the multiplicity of ethnic groups in London, and then invest in specific work to address the challenges.

4. Developing a student lifecycle approach to widening access for London

The importance of understanding access to higher education in terms of outcome as well as input, has been outlined above. This will have a particular regional dimension but it again needs further exploration in particular where access to employment after higher education is concerned. Table 5 shows that over 20,000 graduates are in the NEET category in London.

Table 5: Proportion of those NEET (Not in Education, Employment of Training) aged 16-24 resident in London by highest qualification, 2012

Highest educational qualification	Number of NEETs	Proportion of NEETs
Degree or equivalent	24,352	19
Higher education	4,972	4
GCE, A-level or equivalent	31,546	25
GCSE grades A*–C or equivalent	32,771	26
Other qualifications	16,049	13
No qualification	18,132	14

Annual Population Survey (2012)

Table 5 has to be seen in the context of the high overall number of graduates in London — and the high numbers of students graduating per year in London. Over 60% of the inner London population are graduates (ONS 2013). Those who graduate from London HEIs also have the highest salaries three years after graduation of any region in the country (HESA 2013).

However, this still appears a large number of graduate NEETS in London. It may be a category constructed by those coming into it between jobs or trying to enter the labour market. Hence, it might be a fluid group in terms of membership. However, there could also be a concern regarding the numbers who may be in this group for some time.

The issue of the employment of graduates from widening access groups is a national one. However, as with those related to measurement of HE participation London is in a unique position due to the concentration of such graduates and graduate employers. It is also however in a prime position to develop a better understanding of the issues and how they could be addressed. London can take the lead in establishing a dialogue between employers, higher education institutions and schools/colleges regarding the career progression of learners from widening access backgrounds.

There are also significant gaps in understanding where the issues of success and progression gaps for learners from widening access background are concerned in England per se, and this is recognized in the recent National Strategy. While the need for a whole student lifecycle approach to access, progression and success is becoming accepted how this is delivered at the level of the institution or at the level of the area for example is still something at an early stage of development. The linkages that exist in HEIs between those responsible for outreach, learning and teaching, student support and employability differ greatly between institutions.

London also has three collaborative networks which encourage dialogue between HEIs and collaboration around particular areas of practice. It is better served than any other area of the country where mechanisms to encourage collaboration are concerned. However, overall these networks focus pre-dominantly on access into not success and progression through HE. The balance of collaborative focus should change toward a more student lifecycle approach.

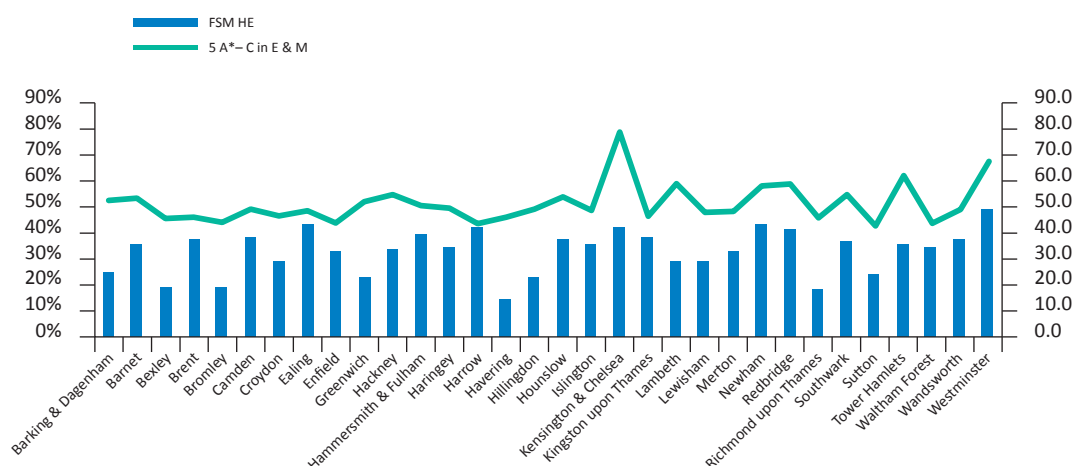
Recommendation

AccessHE, as the widening access network in London with the largest number of HEI members, should begin to steer its strategic and operational efforts toward a whole student lifecycle approach to access to higher education.

5. Addressing the ‘postcode progression lottery’ for widening access learners in London

The available data shows that the progression of learners into HE in London from lower socio economic groups is very uneven. It also appears that this unevenness cannot be accounted for entirely by differences in achievement. Table 6 below shows HE participation amongst and attainment by learners on free school meals at 15.

Table 6: Higher Education Participation by Local Authority for learners from free-school meal backgrounds at 15 and % of learners in that authority on FSM achieving 5 A*-C in E & M

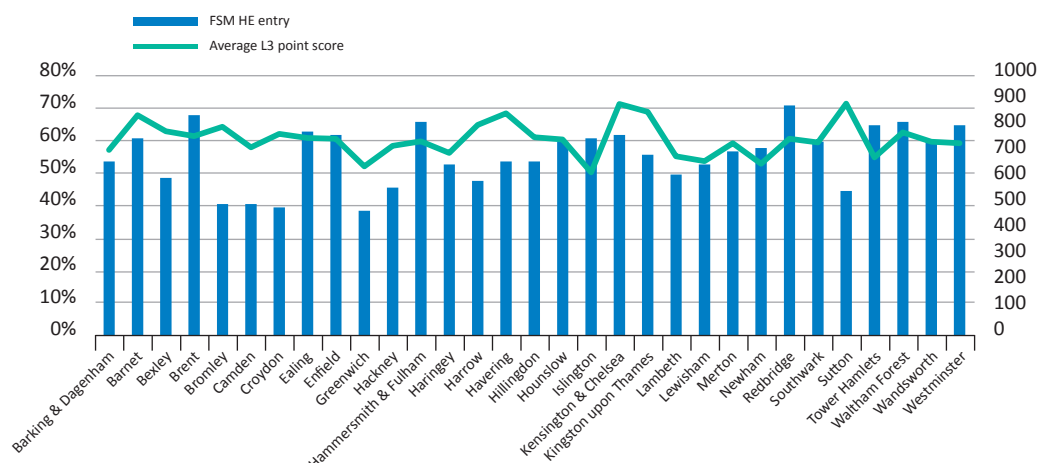


Data from BIS (2013) & Department of Education (2012)

The table shows that the areas where progression is low e.g. Havering, Bexley, Richmond upon-Thames are not those where achievement for this group is lowest. Indeed achievement is relatively even with the exception of a small number of boroughs, while progression is not. The measure of attainment here is relatively blunt, in that it can cover quite a large range of abilities. Nevertheless the data re-affirms the need for some greater exploration here. Table 7 below shows a similar kind of relationship for learners progression to HE at 18. The difference here is that it looks at learners who are in receipt of FSM in schools at 18 (a smaller group than those in Table 6 as many FSM eligible young people may be in other forms of training or work). It shows that there are different performance levels by local authority area where progression is concerned that do not map exactly onto attainment.

Overall the participation rates of FSM pupils is very impressive, exceeding that amongst non-FSM learners in many areas of the country. However, the variations between local authorities in the capital is significant and cannot be ignored.

Table 7: Higher Education Participation by Local Authority for learners from free-school meal backgrounds 16-18 and average Level 3 point score of learners in that authority.



Data from Department of Education (2013) and Department of Education (2014)

These two tables show that there appears to be other factors at play here that may be accounting for the uneven progression of learners aside from attainment. To look at this picture yet another way, London Councils commissioned work in 2013 looking at HE progression by borough interrogating data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency. Table 8 below takes the 10 areas with the highest participation rates in this analysis and includes how well they do at progression for those from FSM backgrounds at 15 using BIS data. The latter data is for progression a year earlier than the London Councils work but the patterns are clear and huge change in a year is unlikely. Overall the areas with high levels of overall participation also do relatively well where FSM progression is concerned. But that is not the case for all of them.

Table 8: HE participation by Local Authority area for all learners vs participation by learners from FSM backgrounds

Local Authority	18-20 year old London residents' HE participation rates in 2011/12	Estimated percentage of maintained school pupils aged 15 in 2006/07 by Free School Meal status who entered HE in 2009/10 at age 18 or 2010/11 at age 19
Harrow	89.9	44
Richmond upon Thames	81.1	19
Barnet	77.1	37
Redbridge	74.9	43
Merton	73.1	34
Bromley	69.5	20
Ealing	67.3	45
Sutton	65.7	25
Brent	61	39
Enfield	58.6	34
Croydon	57	30

Tindell et al (2013)

It is not clear whether any statutory agencies are taking ownership of this challenge. There is intense policy focus at present on closing the gap in school attainment between learners from different social backgrounds. However, what London's experience may be showing is that even when progress is made toward closing this gap, it does not necessarily translate into the kind of post school progression for learners from lower socio-economic groups, that their attainment implies they may be capable of.

Recommendation

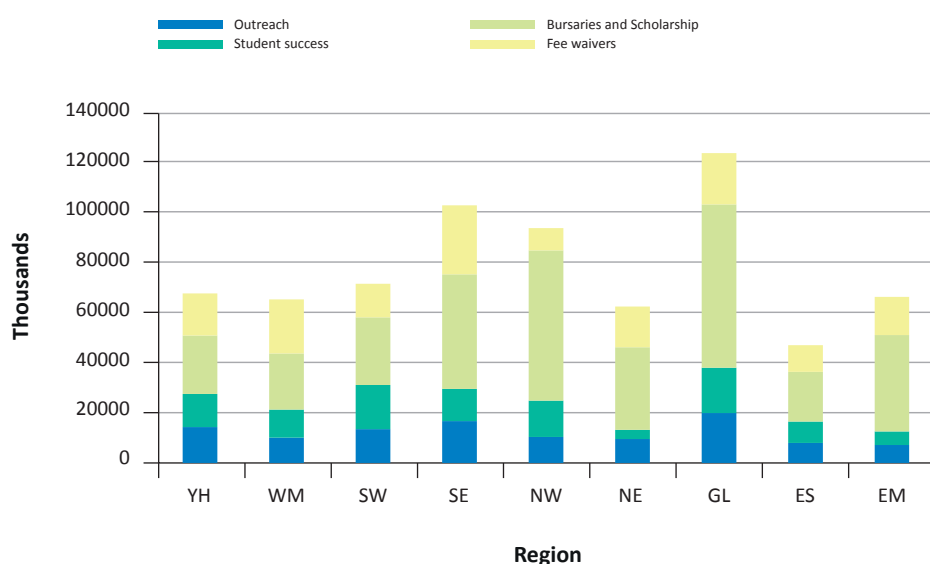
Statutory agencies in London should work, with the support of the HE sector, to develop a pan-London approach to addressing the 'postcode lottery' in HE progression within the city for learners from lower socio-economic groups.

6. Maximising the Access investment in London

London has a rich and unique access to higher education ecosystem, reflected in the concentration of HE providers, voluntary sector organisations and employers active in the HE access space as well as collaborative networks. There are also significant complementary between funding streams which could assist in addressing the unique access challenges described above.

Table 9 below shows the investment in bursaries, scholarships and outreach activity amongst London HEIs in 2011-12 relative to that from other areas. London HEIs are spending more than those in any other region on widening access by some distance. The total investment is over £120m. The vast majority of this however is in student support, but £20m is allocated to outreach work.

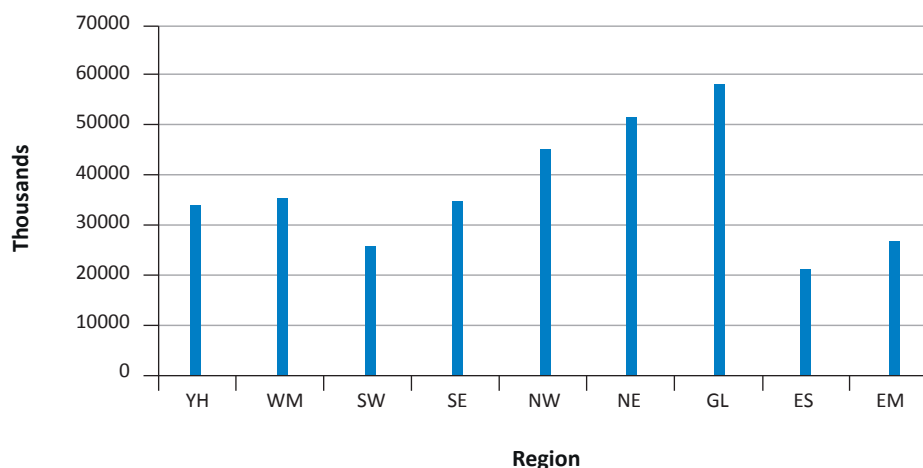
Table 9: Access Agreement Expenditure by type of spend and region in 2014-15



Data from OFFA (2014)

Table 10 below shows the funds they receive from HEFCE to support widening access and retention as part of their student opportunity allocation. Again, London receives the most funds at nearly £60m. These funds are to support student access and success.

Table 10: Student Opportunity Allocation Funding in 2014-15



Data from HEFCE 2014(a)

The total investment in access to higher education work through London HEIs is close to £180m in 2014–15.

As outlined above London HEIs educate a significant proportion of learners from widening access backgrounds and lead the country here. Hence, on one level this level of investment is relatively speaking bringing a clear return. However, there could also be ways in which more efficient use could be made of these funds. To a significant extent HEIs in London face a set of shared challenges encapsulated above — for example the problems of unevenness in participation across the capital, addressing access and success coherently and understanding the implications for practice of the ethnic diversity in London. However, in the main, they choose to address these challenges individually. This is understandable when the national policy framework is predicated on investment in access work being channelled by HEIs themselves as opposed to any collective mechanism, but there is still room for greater collaboration.

While this is a significant sum it is less than the £344m invested in overcoming differences in attainment in London schools via the pupil premium. These funds are used to support the bridging of the overall attainment gap between learners from different backgrounds and there are many different calls on the use of these funds and that is clearly acknowledged here. But there is certainly room for work with HEIs to contribute to this agenda for schools.

The HEFCE are also set to invest a further £22m in the development of new networks for collaborative outreach across the country in 2014–15 (HEFCE 2014b). The support that London learners and its HEIs will benefit from through this investment adds to the resources being directed into the access field. It also represents an opportunity for new dialogue between HEIs, schools and colleges but crucially with the wider set of organisations working in complementary fields to HE access. This investment will only have a significant impact in London if it is used smartly — as a lever to encourage some greater synergy between existing work and as we can see above, much larger amounts of funding in this space. It will also only advance access to higher education work if it can be used in such a way as to enable the development of the whole student lifecycle approach in London described above. So, while the new investment in collaboration in access does present opportunities they have to be seen in context.

Recommendation

A strategic approach to identifying and supporting synergy between funding streams and organisations, in the area of access and success should be developed taken forward by a London Access to Higher Education and Social Mobility Forum.

7 . Summary

London's relative over-achievement in some aspects of access to HE should be recognized as important and impressive. However, it cannot be allowed to mask the ongoing challenges the capital faces in ensuring those from all social groups are able to access and succeed in HE. There are still too many aspects of HE participation in London that we do not know enough about. There are also inequalities that we know exist but where it is not clear the action that is being taken to address them. The challenge for education providers in London is to be pro-active in the face of the challenges above. This will take new forms of connectivity and collaboration. There is significant resource coming into this area in the capital which significantly exceeds that in any other area of the country, and may well exceed or at least rival any other in the world.

Higher education is investing £180m in access to higher education work. As well as scrutinising how to maximise the value of this investment we should look to grow it collectively. It is not unrealistic given the size of the school and college sector and the concentration of employers to look to match the £180m investment of HE in the near future to create a bigger, Social Mobility Fund for London to address the continuing challenges identified in this report. This fund would aim to place London not just at the forefront of access to higher education and social mobility globally, but in the world.

Research from Deloitte last year argued that London was the 'high skilled' knowledge capital of the world employing more than people in high skilled work than New York, Los Angeles or Hong Kong (Deloitte 2013). The next challenge for London is to be the social mobility capital of the world, providing greater access to these high skilled jobs than any other major city. The opportunity is there to do this, it now requires the political and practical commitment to make it happen.

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