



# University entry & the class of 2021

Who is set to miss out

**An AccessHE Report**

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## → Executive Summary

### Background

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**This report examines how students from different ethnic and lower socio-economic backgrounds entering higher education in 2021 may have their progression affected by the 'learning loss' associated with COVID-19. It looks primarily at the entry qualification profiles of students from London by background and calculates what the impact on participation may be if students achieve lower A-level grades because of the learning loss associated by COVID-19. It then uses the data for London students to extrapolate potential national progression scenarios. It shows that as with the impact of COVID-19 on the health and educational achievement, those from lower socio-economic and BAME backgrounds experience greater disadvantage.**

The data analysed in this report covers A-Level applicants domiciled in London aged 18-24 covering the period 2015-16 to 2019-20. It models the potential impact of learning loss in terms of a lowering of achievement of one grade. Using this historical data which shows qualification profiles by background the analysis focuses on the potential impact of a one grade learning loss on students receiving E grade and those at receiving AAB/ABB. For those with one E grade a one grade loss in achievement would mean they would then have only 2 A Level passes thus heightening the risk of missing out on higher education entry. For those with AAB/ABB a one grade loss in achievement would mean their chances of entering a higher tariff university would be significantly reduced.

### Key Findings

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Due to the learning loss associated with COVID-19:

**Finding 1:** With a one grade decline in achievement over 5000 fewer students from London may be able to enter HE in 2021.

**Finding 2:** Of these 5000 students, nearly 75% are from BAME backgrounds and a quarter are from Black African backgrounds.

**Finding 3:** With a one grade decline in achievement over 5200 students from BAME backgrounds in London risk missing out on places at high tariff or Russell Group institutions.

**Finding 4:** Over 60% of the students who are most at risk of losing a place in higher education from London due to a one grade decline in achievement in 2021 are from the poorest areas as measured by Index of Multiple Deprivation.

**Finding 5:** If the grade profiles of BAME students nationally follow those in London with a one grade decline in achievement over 27,000 students are at risk of missing out on places and nearly 11,000 from BAME backgrounds.

**Finding 6:** With a two grade decline in achievement a further 11,000 students from London would be at risk of losing out on higher education places and a further nearly 50,000 students nationally.

### Recommendations

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**Recommendation 1:** Form a special cross sector taskforce to include universities and schools/colleges and students to ensure that the class of 2021 are not unfairly disadvantaged in progressing to higher education and receive the support they need.

**Recommendation 2:** Universities to account for potential learning loss in offer making to students in 2021, particularly to BAME students, considering how to measure potential in as broad a way as possible.

**Recommendation 3:** Undertake detailed analysis of national qualification entry profiles by social background for students entering higher education in 2021 and 2022 for all qualification routes, including those not taking A-Levels.

**Recommendation 4:** Extend the recently launched National Tutoring Programme to Level 3 learners post 16.

**Recommendation 5:** Fund additional higher education information, advice and guidance for the class of 2021.

**Recommendation 6:** Government to consult with schools/colleges/universities and students regarding using teacher predictions rather than examinations to construct A Level grades in 2021.

# → 1. Introduction

**There is an emerging volume of evidence documenting the potential impact of COVID-19 on the educational outcomes of pupils in compulsory schooling from lower socio-economic backgrounds<sup>1</sup>. To the extent that pupils from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately represented in low income groups COVID-19 may have a greater impact on such pupils<sup>2</sup>. Pupils from BAME backgrounds also have to contend with the greater impact of the disease on their families and community<sup>3</sup>. A further area in which low income and BAME students may experience potential greater disadvantage however, is in relation to their participation in higher education (HE) in 2020-21 and subsequent years.**

This report primarily examines how students from different ethnic and lower socio-economic backgrounds entering higher education from London may have their progression affected by COVID-19. It looks at the entry qualification profiles of students by background and calculates what the impact on participation may be if students achieve lower A-level grades because of the learning loss associated by COVID-19. This analysis builds on that undertaken for the 2018 AccessHE report '*Preparing for hyper-diversity: London's student population in 2030*<sup>4</sup>. The insights from examining London learners potential HE progression patterns is used to explore national implications for progression by BAME background.

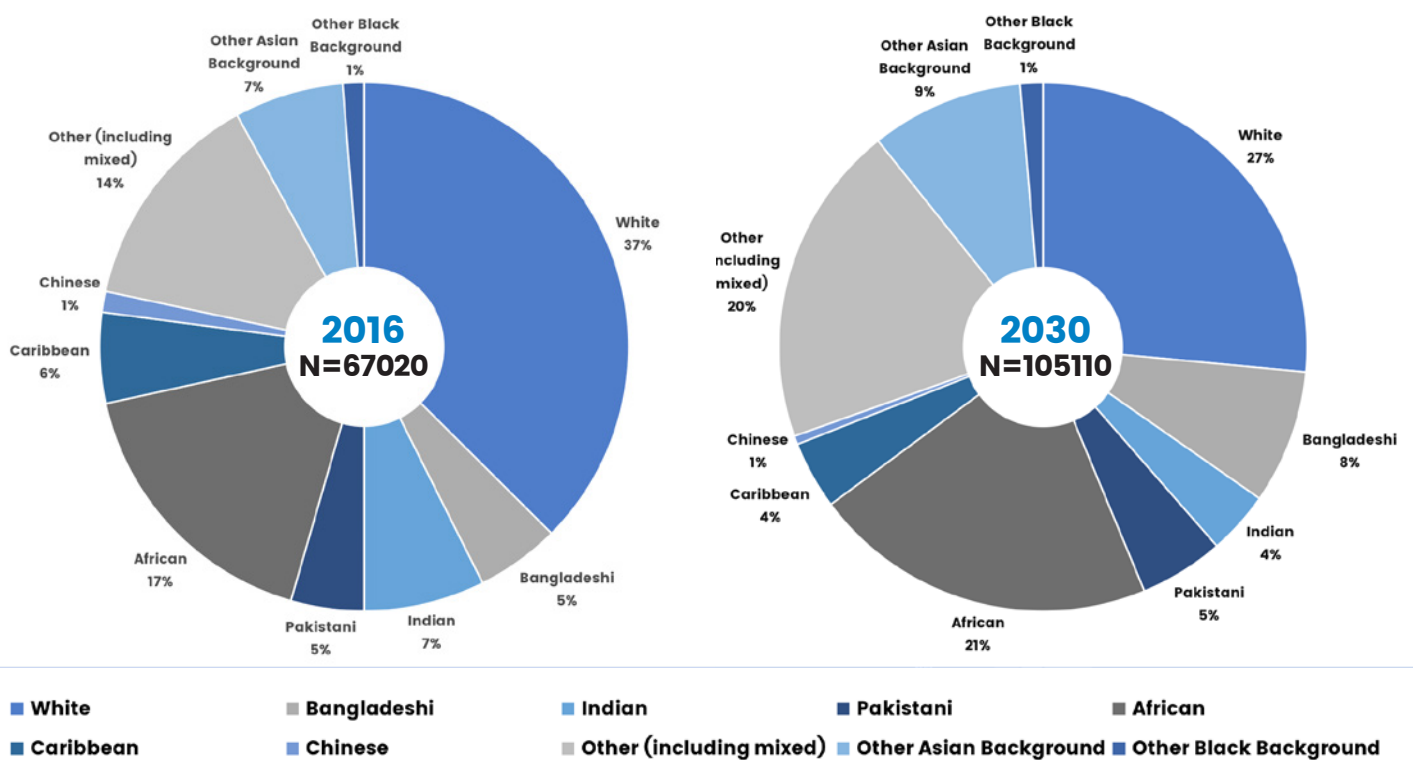
The danger identified in this report is that learners from BAME and lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have their HE progression opportunities constrained by COVID-19. In order to mitigate this threat specific support measures need to be put in place to support the attainment of this year's A-Level (and Level 2 vocational cohort) and universities need to build into their offer making strategies for 2020-21 the potential impact of COVID-19.

1. Willis, C. (2020) The impact of Covid-19 on children's learning, London: NFER – see <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/news-events/nfer-blogs/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-childrens-learning> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Early-Years-Impact-Brief.pdf>
2. see Willis, C. (2020)
3. Public Health England (2020) Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19 – see [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/908434/](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908434/)
4. Atherton, G. & Mazhari, T. (2020) '*Preparing for hyper-diversity: London's student population in 2030*', London: London Higher

## → 2. Higher Education in London – the extent of diversity

Our first report in 2018 highlighted the ‘hyperdiversity’ amongst young students entering higher education from London. This hyperdiversity is in part a function of the high numbers of residents from different ethnic backgrounds relative to the rest of the United Kingdom, but also reflects the high levels of attainment at GCSE level of certain BAME groups,<sup>5</sup> the higher proclivity to progress to higher education amongst such groups<sup>6</sup> and to an extent the concentration of higher education providers in the capital. The consequence of these differences in demographic increase when combined with a participation rate, which over time is increasing for most non-white groups while is close to static for white young people, is increasing diversity amongst students entering higher education from London as Diagram 1 below shows.

**Diagram 1:** A comparison of the composition of the student body (aged 18–24) by ethnicity, in 2016 and 2030



This diagram illustrates that white students still constitute by some the largest single group of young students from London entering higher education. But by 2030 diversity will have significantly increased with the number of students from other (including mixed) backgrounds and from Black African backgrounds especially increasing markedly.

The *Preparing for Hyperdiversity* report also examined projected increases in participation amongst those whose parents did/did not go to higher education and by free school meal background. These learner characteristics are not examined in this report. However, the relationship between A level achievement and Index of Multiple Deprivation is examined.

5. - see <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/gcse-results-attainment-8-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest>  
 6. Crawford, C. and Greaves, E. (2015) Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation BIS Research Paper 186 London: BIS

## → 3. Data and Methods

**The data to undertake the analysis in this report was purchased from UCAS. This data includes A-Level applicants domiciled in London aged 18–24 covering the period 2015–16 to 2019–20. Over the course of the report these students aged 18–24 are described as young students.**

Data on HE participation among older students is relatively limited. Moreover, projections of demographic change are less accurate when made for a wider age group. Data of this nature are also not available by disability status. Thus our decision to focus on younger students exclusively is based on data and methodological constraints, rather than a reflection of greater importance placed on the HE progression of younger, able-bodied students.

It is also important to state that the data purchased from UCAS showed that there were over 23,000 young students entering HE from London who either did not take A-Levels or who we do not have grade profile information on. So, while this report looks at the majority of young students entering HE from London there is a large number whom we need to understand more about.

## → 4. Progression to Higher Education in London – qualification profiles and ethnicity

There have been several attempts to estimate the magnitude of the loss of learning amongst those in compulsory education from March to July 2020 as a result of COVID-19 in terms of time. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) undertook a national survey in July 2020 sent to over 20,000 state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools in England receiving responses from 898 secondary schools. On the basis of the survey they estimated that the perceived learning loss in the most deprived schools was approximately 3.7 months, compared to 2.4 months in the least deprived schools.<sup>7</sup> These time estimates have not been equated to a potential impact on actual attainment – although research from the Education Endowment Foundation produced in June 2020 estimated that the gap between learners from different backgrounds will increase.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult then at this point (in October 2020) to calculate a clear estimate of the impact of COVID-19 on the grades that students might obtain at A-Level in summer 2020. Hence, for the purposes of deriving an estimate of a change in actual numbers entering higher education from London due to COVID-19 it is assumed that the loss in learning will lead to students achieving one grade lower than what they would have received. Given the amount of time that learners have missed due to COVID-19 and the ongoing disruption that learners are experiencing in academic year 2020-21 a one grade decline in achievement would seem to be a suitable assumption, which if anything may be conservative.

The analysis then concentrates on students entering higher education receiving at least one E grade and what would happen if they then went from a grade E to a U. This would leave them with only 2 A Levels and E or above. It is possible of course to enter higher education with 2 A-Levels or less. Admission decision are at the behest of the higher education provider. However, only 2 passes at A Level would significantly disadvantage learners attempting to enter HE.

In Table 1 below the percentage of young students from London entering higher education who have at least one E grade is outlined.

**Table 1:** The percentage of young students entering higher education in 2019-20 from London receiving at least one E grade

Ethnic Group	% of students receiving at least one E grade
Asian - Bangladeshi	16
Asian - Chinese	4
Asian - Indian	12
Asian - Other Asian background	15
Asian - Pakistani	16
Black - African	20
Black - Caribbean	19
Black - Other black background	15
Mixed - Other mixed background	10
Mixed - White & Asian	7
Mixed - White and Black African	15
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	12
Other ethnic background	16
White	8

7. Sharp, C. (2020) The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020. London: NFER - see [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools\\_responses\\_to\\_covid\\_19\\_the\\_challenges\\_facing\\_schools\\_and\\_pupils\\_in\\_september\\_2020.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools_responses_to_covid_19_the_challenges_facing_schools_and_pupils_in_september_2020.pdf)

8. Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Rapid evidence assessment Impact of school closures on the attainment gap - see [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/REA\\_-\\_Impact\\_of\\_school\\_closures\\_on\\_the\\_attainment\\_gap\\_summary.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/REA_-_Impact_of_school_closures_on_the_attainment_gap_summary.pdf)



As can be seen there are some quite significant differences by ethnic group with the percentage of students with at least one E grade ranging from 4% for Chinese young people to 20% for Black African young people. It is noticeable that white students appear to have relatively fewer students in this category than all the other groups with the exception of the Chinese/White & Asian.

In Table 2 below the potential impact of students with at least one E grade receiving an ungraded/unclassified mark rather than an E grade on participation by ethnic group on 2021 higher education entry is outlined. As described above the assumption is that the consequence of moving to 2 A levels is that a student will not enter higher education.

The table shows the predicted change in participation by ethnic group that would occur without the COVID-19 learning loss as a result of demographic change and changes in the higher education participation rate of the group. With the exception of Black Caribbean students there is a predicted increase in participation for every ethnic group and overall a slight rise of around 600 students.

Once the 'learning loss' is factored in the picture looks markedly different. Overall participation has reduced by over 5000 students compared to the numbers of participants in 2019. At the time of writing the numbers of students entering higher education from London in 2020 is not available. However the data that is available nationally from UCAS shows that the numbers of students entering higher education in 2020 in England is likely to be higher than it was in 2019<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the fall in participation in 2021 may be even larger when compared to 2020 than 2019 if results return to the 2019 trend.

Where different ethnic groups are concerned though the potential reduction in higher education participation is even more striking. The reduction in the number of Black African students is almost the same as that of white students even though overall there are nearly three times as many white as Black African students progressing to higher education. There also noticeable reductions in the number of Bangladeshi, Indian and other ethnic group students entering higher education as a result of COVID-19.

**Table 2: Impact of Covid-19 on number of young students entering higher education from London in 2021 by ethnic group**

Ethnicity	Numbers of students 2019-2020	Rate of demographic change to 2020-2021 (%)	HE entry rate from for 2020-21 (%)	Total expected change in HE entry in 2021 (%)	Total expected change in HE entry in 2021	Total number of students in 2021 (without learning loss of one grade)	% of students obtaining at least 1 E grade 2019-20	Reduction in number of students due to 'learning loss' 2021	Projected number of students 2021 after learning loss
Asian – Bangladeshi	2795	3	0.05	3.05	85	2880	0.16	461	2419
Asian – Chinese	595	0.5	-0.02	0.49	3	597	0.04	24	573
Asian – Indian	3710	1.07	-0.01	1.07	40	3749	0.12	450	3300
Asian – Other Asian background	3560	1.63	0.03	1.67	59	3619	0.15	543	3077
Asian – Pakistani	2360	2.5	0.03	2.53	59	2419	0.16	387	2032
Black – African	6830	1.9	0.03	1.95	133	6962	0.20	1393	5570
Black – Caribbean	1515	-0.003	-0.04	-0.04	-1	1514	0.19	288	1227
Black – Other Black background	365	1.61	-0.02	-0.02	6	370	0.15	56	315
Mixed – Other mixed background	1420	2.65	0.04	0.04	38	1458	0.10	146	1312
Mixed – White and Asian	1280	2.65	0.05	0.05	34	1314	0.07	92	1222
Mixed – White and Black African	535	2.65	0.04	0.04	14	549	0.15	82	467
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	845	2.65	0.04	0.04	23	868	0.12	104	764
Other ethnic background	2920	2.65	-0.01	2.64	77	2997	0.16	480	2518
White	17680	0.79	-0.01	0.78	137	17817	0.08	1425	16392
All students	46410				707	47117		5931	41186

10. See – (UCAS 2020) More Students from the disadvantaged backgrounds across the UK are set to start degrees this autumn, 24th September 2020 – see <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/more-students-most-disadvantaged-backgrounds-across-uk-are-set-start-degrees-autumn>

## Widening the parameters of the model

The parameters of the model above could be widened to identify what may happen if learning loss was defined as a decline in achievement by 2 grades. Given the ongoing disruption to present delivery of education and the extent of the time lost in 2020 already due to the pandemic such an outcome is certainly conceivable. Table 3 below shows the number of students who have received D grade only (not including those who have received E grades counted in Table 2 above). In the event of a decline in achievement of 2 grades affecting their D grade these additional students would then fall into the 2 E only category and be at greater risk of losing out on a higher education place or having their choices severely curtailed.

**Table 3: Average number of students per year 2015-16 to 2019-20 with one D grade (no E grade)**

Ethnic Group	No of students with at least one D grade
Asian - Bangladeshi	710
Asian - Chinese	85
Asian - Indian	600
Asian - Other Asian background	825
Asian - Pakistani	625
Black - African	2170
Black - Caribbean	435
Black - Other black background	115
Mixed - Other mixed background	355
Mixed - White & Asian	195
Mixed - White and Black African	135
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	265
Other ethnic background	610
White	2985
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,110</b>

## → 5. Progression to Higher Education in London – qualification profiles and socio-economic background

A range of indicators are used to understand differences in participation by socio-economic background in England. The one favoured by the Office for Students is the Participation in Local Areas (POLAR) measure. The POLAR measure classifies areas across the UK based on the proportion of the young population that participates in higher education. POLAR classifies local areas into five groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 18-year olds who enter higher education ages 18 or 19 years old.<sup>11</sup> The use of POLAR as a metric to describe socio-economic disadvantage is problematic anyway and research has suggested that the majority of young people in the lowest POLAR participation quintiles may not be from the poorest households.<sup>12</sup> It is stated by the Office for Students that as POLAR is a measure of educational and not socio-economic disadvantage this may not be so relevant as it appears.<sup>13</sup> Aside from this issue which is taken up in more detail in other reports produced by AccessHE, the specific problem with POLAR for London is that as the capital has relatively high levels of HE participation overall less than 2% of students are progressing to HE from the lowest participation quintile. In order therefore to try and understand the relative impact of any learning loss on HE participation by socio-economic background in London another indicator is needed.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (or neighbourhoods) in England. It ranks over 32,000 small areas in England in order of deprivation.<sup>14</sup> It combines seven different 'domains' of deprivation which are given different weights to reflect their relative importance. The domains are employment, education, health, crime, barriers to Housing and Services and living environment. IMD does suffer from the same general critique levelled at POLAR i.e. it is a geographical measure and therefore cannot offer any certainties regarding the actual economic situation of those who live in a particular IMD are no matter how small they may be. However, it does allow in the London case some form of differentiation of learners by a proxy measure of socio-economic background.

In Table 3 below students from London entering HE for the period 2019–20 have been differentiated by IMD quintile with IMD quintile 1 being the most deprived areas and then IMD 5 the least deprived. Table 4 shows that the percentage of students with at least one E grade in is highest for IMD 1 learners and then decreases so that for IMD 5 learners they are almost a third as likely to enter HE with one E grade.

**Table 4:** The percentage of students entering HE with at least one E grade by IMD quintile in 2019–20

Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile	% of students receiving at least one E grade
IMD quintile 1	17
IMD 2	15
IMD 3	12
IMD 4	8
IMD 5	6

11. Atherton, G., Boffey, R & Kazim T. (2019) *POLAR Opposite: How the targeting of learners for widening access to HE work could be improved*, London: London Higher Atherton et al (2019)

12. Boliver, V, Gorard, S. & Siddiqui, N. (2019) Using contextualised admissions to widen access to higher education: a guide to the evidence base – see - <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/dece/ContextualisedHEadmissions.pdf>

13. Atherton et al (2019)

14. see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

In Table 5 below the potential implications for the numbers of students from London entering HE from different IMD quintiles who have at least one E grade of a loss of one grade is presented.

It shows that of the projected 5444 fewer students who it is predicted will enter HE in 2021-22 than would have been the case without the impact of Covid-19, nearly 60% come from IMD quintiles 1 and 2.

**Table 5:** Impact of Covid-19 on number of young students entering higher education from London in 2021 by IMD quintile

IMD Quintile	Number of students 2019-2020	Rate of demographic change to 2020-2021 (%)	HE entry rate for 2020-2021 (%)	Total change - expected change in HE entry in 2021 (%)	Total expected change in HE entry in 2021	Total number of students in 2021 (without learning loss of one grade)	% of students obtaining at least 1 E grade 2019-20	Number of applicants lost due to drop in one grade	Projected number of students 2021 after learning loss
Overall	44435				714	45159		5444	39705
IMD1	6975	1.21	0.91	2.12	148	7123	0.17	1211	5912
IMD2	12895	1.21	1.38	2.59	334	13229	0.15	1984	11245
IMD3	9875	1.21	0.36	1.57	155	10030	0.12	1204	8826
IMD4	7915	1.21	-0.66	0.55	44	7959	0.08	637	7322
IMD5	6775	1.21	-0.72	0.49	33	6808	0.06	408	6400

## → 6. Progression to Higher Education nationally – qualification profiles, BAME and socio-economic background

The focus of the report thus far has been on the progression of learners from London into HE and the potential impact of learning loss associated with Covid-19. If the data was obtained then it would be possible to do a similar analysis to model the potential impact on HE participation nationally.

### 6.1 Participation of BAME students

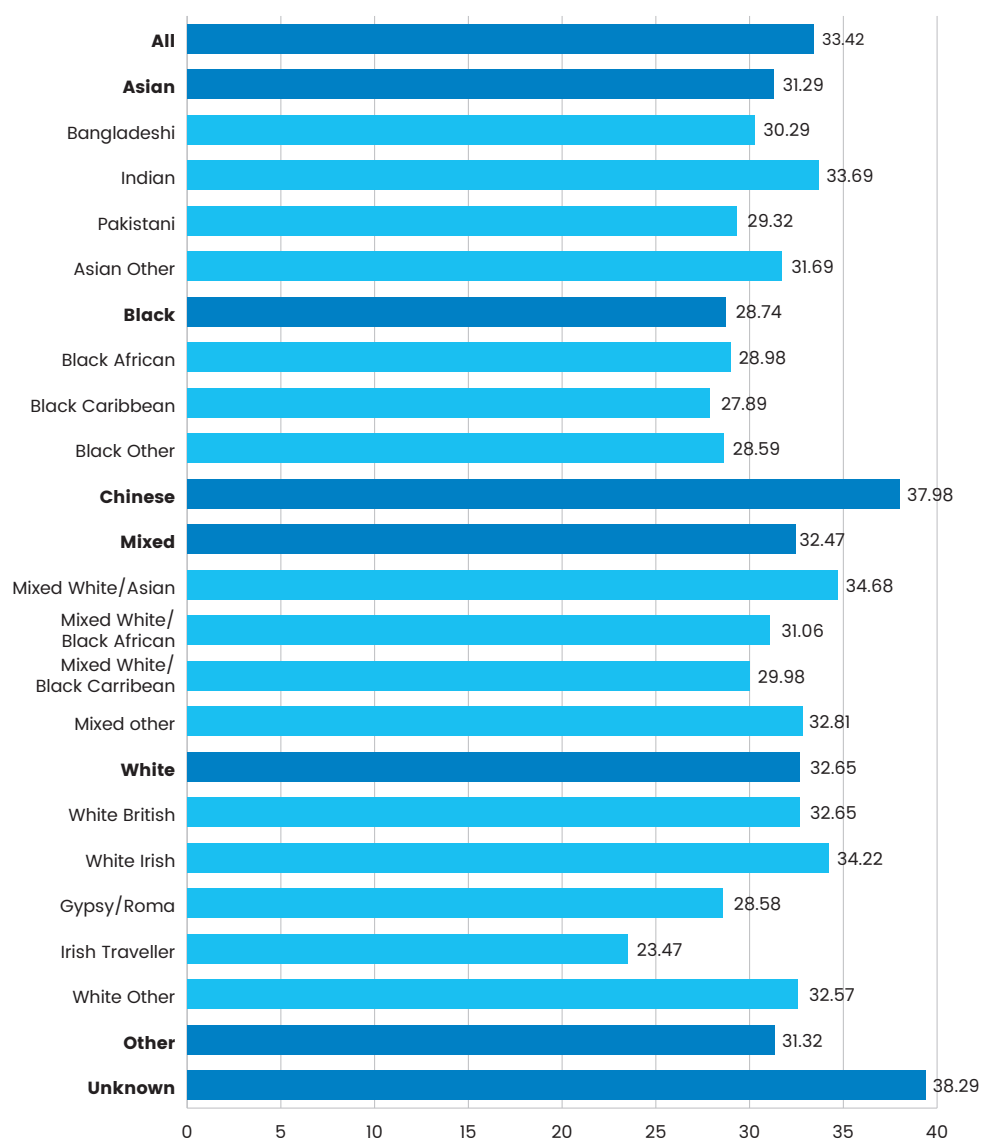
Publicly available data does suggest that though that it is those learners from BAME backgrounds overall, and in particular from certain non-white ethnic groups who are most at risk and also those from lower socio-economic groups.

Diagram 2 below is taken from data produced by the Department of Education. It shows there are distinct differences in average point scores for all Level 3 qualifications.

Black Caribbean students had the lowest average point score (27.89), excluding White Irish Traveller students. Black African students, a group who the London analysis appeared more exposed to a small decline in average performance at A Level also had one of the lowest average point scores. Data is also available just for A Level performance. The picture here is similar to that for all Level 3 qualifications. Aside from Gypsy Roma and Traveller students, it is Black Caribbean, Black African and Black other students who have the lowest average point scores.

Although the data outlined in Diagram 2 is not as granular as that for London it does show that Black students in particular are those who having the lowest average scores are likely to be more at risk of not achieving the grades necessary to enter HE in 2021-22.

**Diagram 2: Average point score by ethnicity (all level 3 qualifications) 2019**



It is possible however to explore the potential impact of a one grade decline in achievement on the progression of students from different ethnic backgrounds in more detail. In Table 6 below the numbers of students who took A Levels in 2018-19 are shown (data for this year is shown as it is the most recent data available). If it is assumed that the same % of these students achieve one E grade as for London students, the impact of these students then achieving a grade less is shown. It would mean nearly 28,000 students who fall into the 2 A-Level group and hence are at much greater risk of not entering HE. Of this 28,000 over 11,000 are from BAME groups.

In terms of the strength of these projections there are clear limitations as the data on A Level grade profiles nationally had not been analysed as it was for London. What is known is that the Average Point score for London students at A Level is slightly lower than the national average<sup>15</sup>. It cannot be deduced from this information whether there are more or

less students in each group nationally with E grades than in London. It does establish though that overall London is not significantly out-performing the country at A Level on average.

The other important point to note is the numbers of students from non-white ethnic groups who are doing A Levels who come from London. Table 6 also shows the numbers of students entering HE by ethnic background from London. Comparing this to the number of students who completed A Levels by ethnic background in 2018 nationally in column 4 it is clear that they represent a significant percentage of all students taking A-Levels for each non-white BAME group. In the case of Black African and other Asian background students it is around 50%.

In addition, Table 6 includes the projected additional impact of a reduction in 2 grades on participation nationally assuming that the different ethnic groups have the same percentage of D grade students as in London.

**Table 6: Possible impact of COVID-19 learning loss on national HE participation**

Ethnic Group	% of students in receiving at least one E grade (London)	No of students entering HE 2018-19 (London)	No of students taking A-Levels 2018-19 (National)	Impact of a reduction of one grade	Impact of a reduction in 2 grades
Asian - Bangladeshi	16	2310	6307	1,009	1576
Asian - Chinese	4	575	1,791	72	250
Asian - Indian	12	3570	11,155	1,339	1784
Asian - Other Asian background	15	3210	6,466	970	3815
Asian - Pakistani	16	2080	12,635	2021	925
Black - African	20	6075	11,923	2385	555
Black - Caribbean	19	1450	3,192	607	1264
Black - Other black background	15	295	1,792	269	498
Mixed - Other mixed background	10	1235	5,057	506	400
Mixed - White & Asian	7	1085	3,322	233	929
Mixed - White and Black African	15	445	1,600	240	1007
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	12	730	2,997	360	34847
Other ethnic background	16	2520	5,200	832	1576
White	8	17,450	204,984	16,398	250
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>43,030</b>	<b>278,421</b>	<b>27,241</b>	<b>47850</b>

15. Department of Education (2019) *A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2018 to 2019 (provisional)* London: Department of Education - see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2018-to-2019-provisional>

## 6.2 Participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds

In terms of HE entry by proxy measures of socio-economic background nationally data is available on achievement differences by learners from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> This data is available for learners taking A Levels and also applied general students. As shown in Table 7 below, disadvantaged students have lower average point scores than non-disadvantaged students – in particular those who are taking A Levels.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 7: Grades by disadvantaged status 2018-19**

Cohort	Attainment measures	Disadvantaged Students	Non-Disadvantaged Students
A-Level	APS	28.70	33.58
	Grade	C	C+
Applied General	APS	27.72	29.26
	Grade	Merit+	Merit+
Tech Levels	APS	26.80	29.20
	Grade	Merit+	Merit+

Given that the disadvantage measure used nationally and the IMD measure used in the analysis clearly differ any kind of extrapolation of London qualification profiles to a national data set is not possible. It is clear from Table 7 though that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are at greater risk of either missing out on HE or having their choices restricted if their achievement levels in 2021 fall further due to Covid-19.

16. Disadvantaged learner are defined as those who...

17. Revised A level and other 16-18 results in England, 2017/2018 – see [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/859515/2019\\_revised\\_A-Level\\_and\\_other\\_16\\_to\\_18\\_results\\_in\\_England.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/859515/2019_revised_A-Level_and_other_16_to_18_results_in_England.pdf)

## → 7. Progression to Higher Education in London and the AAB Threshold

Whilst a learning loss may have the most acute impact on those students whose qualification profiles are likely to include E grades it will also impact on learners across the qualification range. Of particular interest are those students who may be achieving AAB/ABB at A Level as this is a critical level of achievement where entry to more selective universities is concerned. The qualifications required to enter such universities differ by institution and course. Previous work has identified however the importance of these qualification levels in entry to high tariff and Russell Group universities, therefore the impact of a one grade loss in attainment on learners achieving these grade will be modelled for students from different BAME backgrounds and IMD quintiles using these figures.

It is important to attempt to understand the impact of a Covid-19 learning loss on participation in higher tariff universities. Evidence shows that BAME students, those from lower participation neighbourhoods and those from free school meal backgrounds are less likely to enter such universities than other types of institution<sup>18</sup>. Table 8 below shows that it is white students who are most heavily represented amongst the students achieving AAB/ABB. While they represented only a quarter of the students who were at risk due to having one E grade in their qualification profile, they are nearly 50% of the students at risk here.

However, there are particular groups, especially Black African, Indian and other Asian background students, who have relatively large numbers of students who may miss out on entry to these universities. This would only add to the diversity challenges that this part of the HE sector already faces. Table 8 below shows the numbers in 2019-20 achieving AAB/ABB from London entering HE.

**Table 8:** Number of young students with AAB and ABB grades entering higher education from London in 2019-20

Ethnic Group	No with AAB	No with ABB
Asian - Bangladeshi	120	160
Asian - Chinese	50	50
Asian - Indian	210	240
Asian - Other Asian background	170	215
Asian - Pakistani	115	140
Black - African	250	330
Black - Caribbean	50	55
Black - Other black background	10	20
Mixed - Other mixed background	55	80
Mixed - White & Asian	85	90
Mixed - White and Black African	30	35
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	30	45
Other ethnic background	115	160
White	1125	1255
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2415</b>	<b>2875</b>

18. BBC News (2018) Five charts that tell the story of diversity in UK universities – see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-44226434>



## → 8. Key Findings

**There are limitations to the analysis presented by this paper as the focus is only on those students for whom we have A-Level qualification profile data for. A significant number of students entering HE from London who are aged 18-24 qualification profile data is not available for with many of these entering with vocational predominantly BTEC qualifications.**

Nevertheless, the analysis above shows clearly that for the nearly 45,000 students we do have data for, it is those from certain BAME backgrounds and those from areas of highest deprivation in London are most at risk of missing out on higher education participation in 2021, or at best having their choices further limited.

The potential implications for students from these backgrounds experiencing the impact of Covid-19 on their learning most acutely are outlined here.

### **Finding 1:**

With a one grade decline in achievement over 5000 fewer students from London may be able to enter HE in 2021.

### **Finding 2:**

Of these 5000 students, nearly 75% are from BAME backgrounds and a quarter are from Black African backgrounds.

### **Finding 3:**

With a one grade decline in achievement over 5200 students from BAME backgrounds in London risk missing out on places at high tariff or Russell Group institutions.

### **Finding 4:**

Over 60% of the students who are most at risk of losing a place in higher education from London due to a one grade decline in achievement in 2021 are from the poorest areas as measured by Index of Multiple Deprivation.

### **Finding 5:**

If the grade profiles of BAME students nationally follow those in London with a one grade decline in achievement over 27,000 students are at risk of missing out on places and nearly 11,000 from BAME backgrounds.

### **Finding 6:**

With a two grade decline in achievement a further 11,000 students from London would be at risk of losing out on higher education places and a further nearly 50,000 students nationally.

## → 9. Recommendations

The projections for London and certainly for England are estimates. Even if students do achieve lower A Level grades they may still well be admitted to higher education. According to the Universities UK are ready to be flexible<sup>19</sup> and certainly the majority of institutions will seek to admit as many students as they possibly can – particularly assuming the impact of Covid-19 on international student recruitment continues into 2021. However, this report has shown that certain students are at a high risk of being unable to fulfil their aspirations regarding entering HE in 2021. The A-Level results crisis of last year showed the problems that can ensue when assumptions replace actions. Hence, there is a case for action now to try and ensure that students from all social backgrounds who have the potential and desire to enter HE in 2021 are definitely able to do so. It is unacceptable to expose them to the uncertainty that their predecessors had to endure as part of the 2020 HE admissions cycle. In order to achieve this goal this report makes the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 1:**

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Form a special cross sector taskforce to include universities and schools/colleges and students to ensure that the class of 2021 are not unfairly disadvantaged in progressing to higher education and receive the support they need.

### **Recommendation 2:**

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Universities to account for potential learning loss in offer making to students in 2021, particularly to BAME students and those from lower socio-economic groups, considering how to measure potential in as broad a way as possible.

### **Recommendation 3:**

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Undertake detailed analysis of national qualification entry profiles by social background for students entering higher education in 2021 and 2022 for all qualification routes, including those not taking A-Levels.

### **Recommendation 4:**

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Extend the recently launched National Tutoring Programme to Level 3 learners post 16.

### **Recommendation 5:**

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Fund additional higher education information, advice and guidance for the class of 2021.

### **Recommendation 6:**

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Government to consult with schools/colleges/universities and students regarding using teacher predictions rather than examinations to construct A Level grades in 2021.

19. UCAS (2020) Universities and Admissions Leaders encourage students to be ambitious with their 2021 applications - see <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/universities-and-admissions-leaders-encourage-students-be-ambitious-their-2021-applications>






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