

A photograph of two students, a man and a woman, smiling and looking at a laptop screen in a library setting. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background. A large red semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title and speaker information.

Equality in higher education – UCAS' role

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Summary

- Why are we bothered about equality?
- The admissions process – is it fair?
- How can equality be measured? Where are we now?
- Contextual information and data
- Discussion

UCAS

Universities &
Colleges
Admissions
Services



At the heart of **connecting people**
to **higher education**



UCAS is an
independent
charity

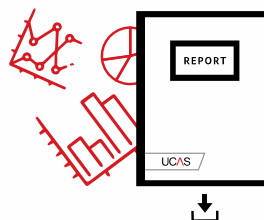


with a
commercial
subsidiary



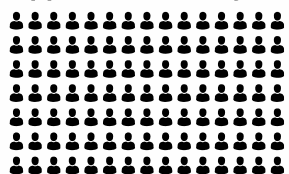
Profits from UCAS Media
go back into the charity

Understanding demand
for higher education

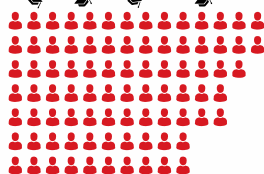


we publish a volume of **data**
and analysis, **freely available**
to **download** and re-use

700k^{*}
applications last year



535k^{*}
accepted to a course



^{*}699,850 applications and 533,890 accepted into full time study in 2017.



UCAS

The political context

“One of the great social achievements of the last half-century has been the transformation of an academic university education, from something enjoyed almost-exclusively by a social elite, into something which is open to everyone.”

Prime Minister, Theresa May

“Every child, no matter their background, should have an equal chance of going on to higher education, and it is this ambition that drives forward the work of this Government.”

**Scottish Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science,
Shirley-Anne Somerville**

Fairness in the admissions process

- In autumn 2015, the government asked UCAS to work with the sector to explore the feasibility for introducing name-blind applications.
- Two reports: [Unconscious Bias 2016 report](#) and [Minimising the risks of unconscious bias in university admissions: 2017 update on progress](#).
- The latter draws on the findings from six pilot projects, which indicate that name-blind applications do not impact on an applicant's chances of receiving an offer.
- In two of the projects, the universities found that masking applicants' names appeared to have a negative impact on initial admissions outcomes – hindering the linking of data sets.
- UCAS continues to:
 - encourage processes to minimise the risk of unconscious bias, and enhance quality assurance
 - publish resources, such as our [equalities release](#), and make data available to researchers, to enhance the understanding of widening participation and social mobility at a local and national level.

A group of people, including a man and a woman, are sitting at a desk in a library or study. They are smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. A large red semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

**Commenting on the picture
of equality through data**

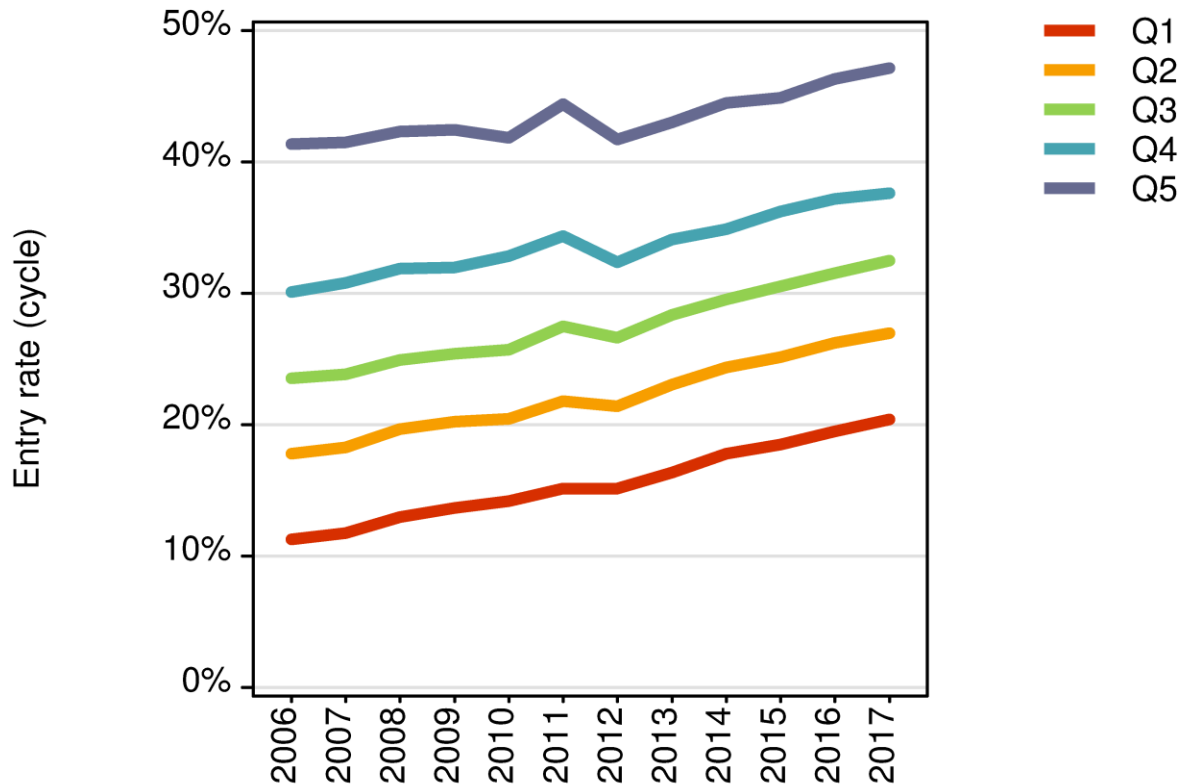
Measuring equality

Overall:

- Equality saw little to no progress in 2017.
- Single dimensional equality analysis means blind spots.
- Multiple equality measure (MEM) provides more complete picture.

Measuring equality

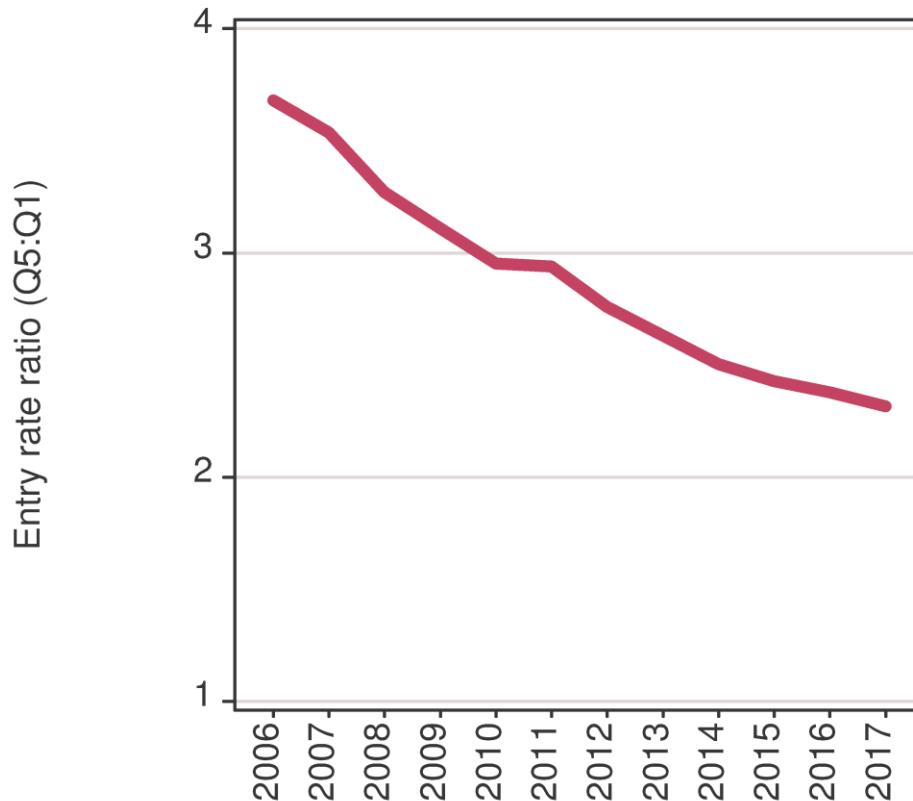
POLAR3



- Q1 (most disadvantaged) entry rate highest on record – 20.4%.
- Q1 had biggest increase of any quintile.
- In England, Scotland and, Wales Q5:Q1 gap fell.

Measuring equality

POLAR3 – entry rate ratio

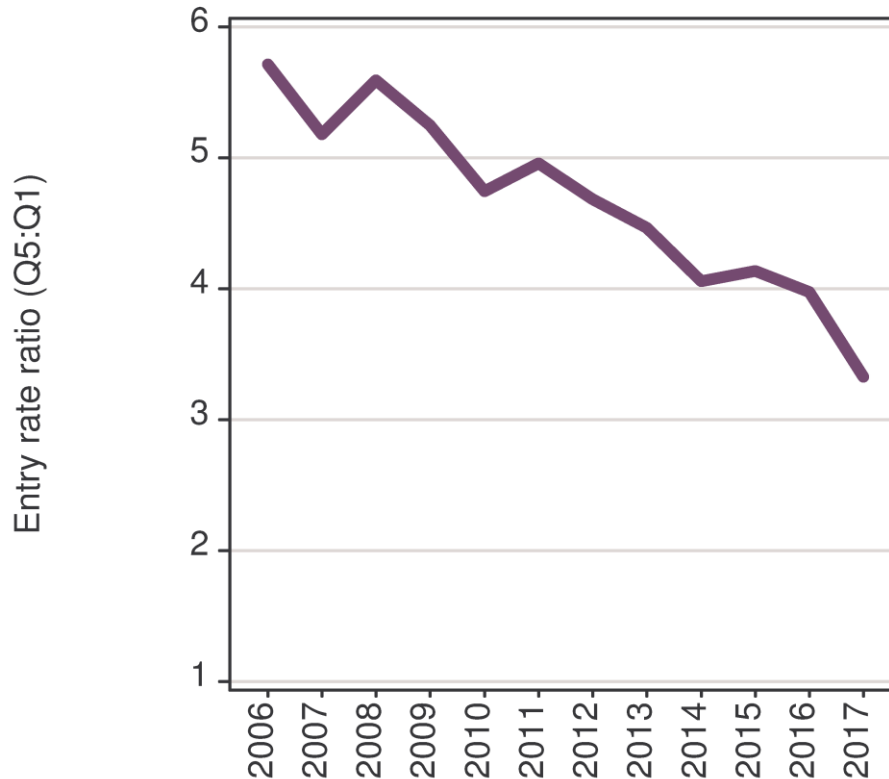


— POLAR3

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Measuring equality

SIMD

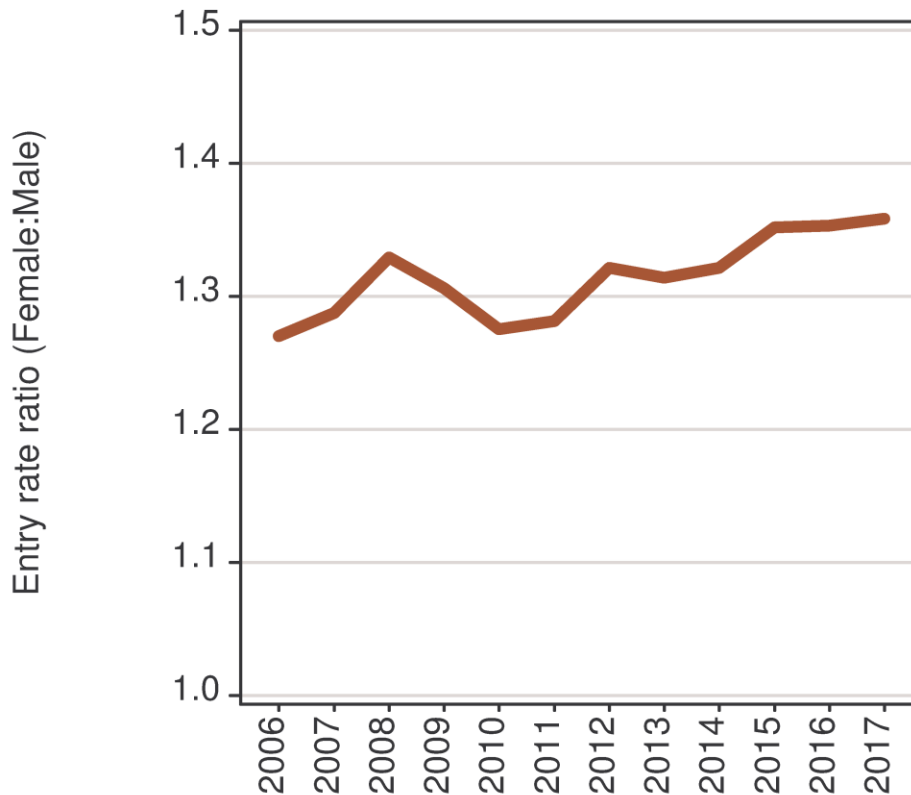


— SIMD 2016

- Q1 (most disadvantaged) entry rate highest on record – 12.3%.
- Q1 had biggest increase of any quintile across period – 16.2%.
- Q5:Q1 gap fell to 3.3 times.

Measuring equality

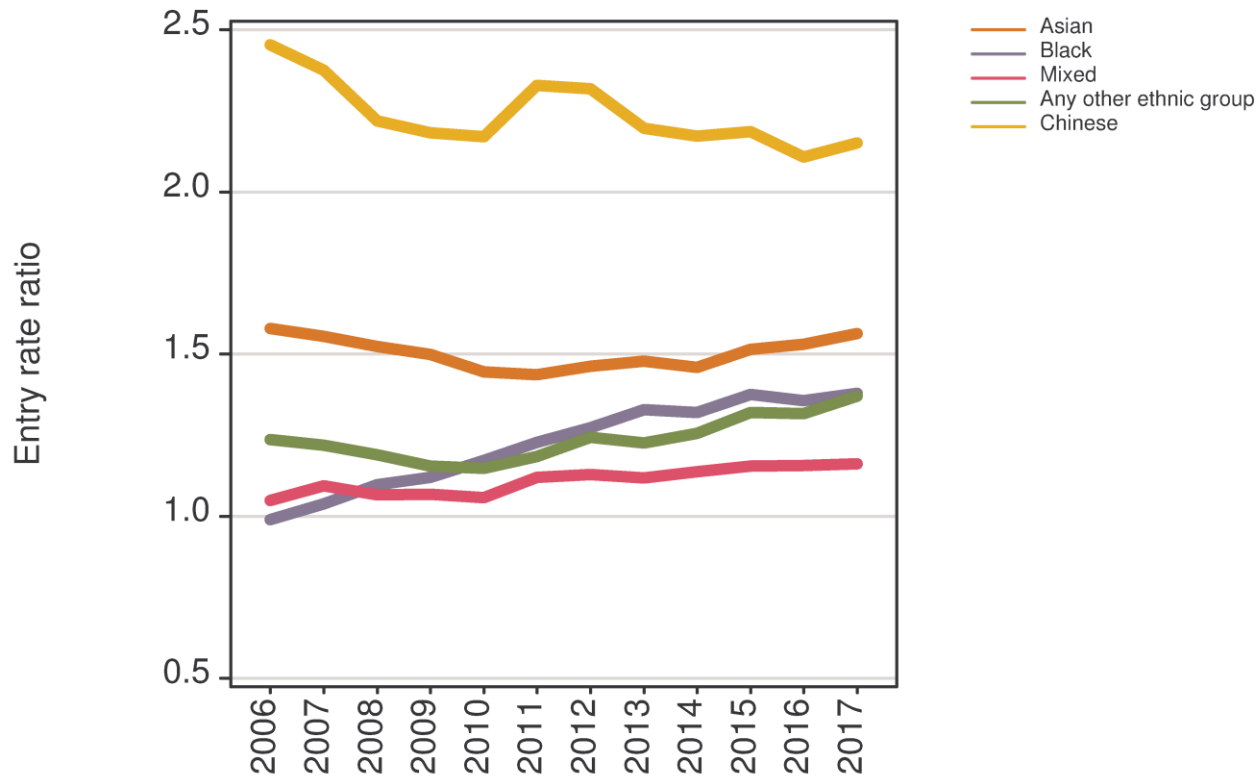
Sex



- In 2017, 37.7% of women entered HE, compared to 27.8% of men.
- Gender gap widened to 9.9 percentage points – women over a third more likely to enter university than men.

Measuring equality

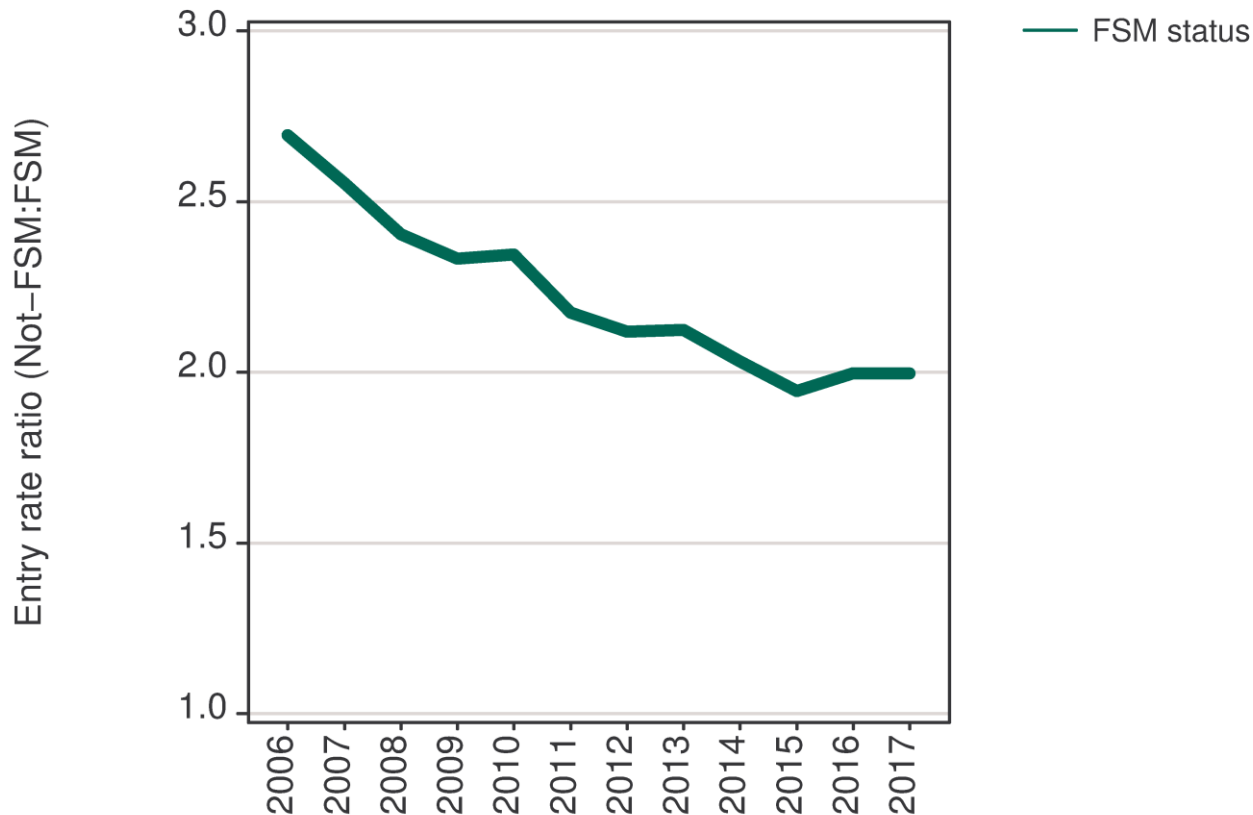
Ethnic group



- White ethnic group have lowest entry rate (29.3%). Chinese ethnic group the highest (63.0%).
- White ethnic group had lowest increase of any ethnic group (1.5%).
- Chinese ethnic group 2.2 times more likely to enter HE than white ethnic group. Gaps to other ethnic groups unchanged/increasing.

Measuring equality

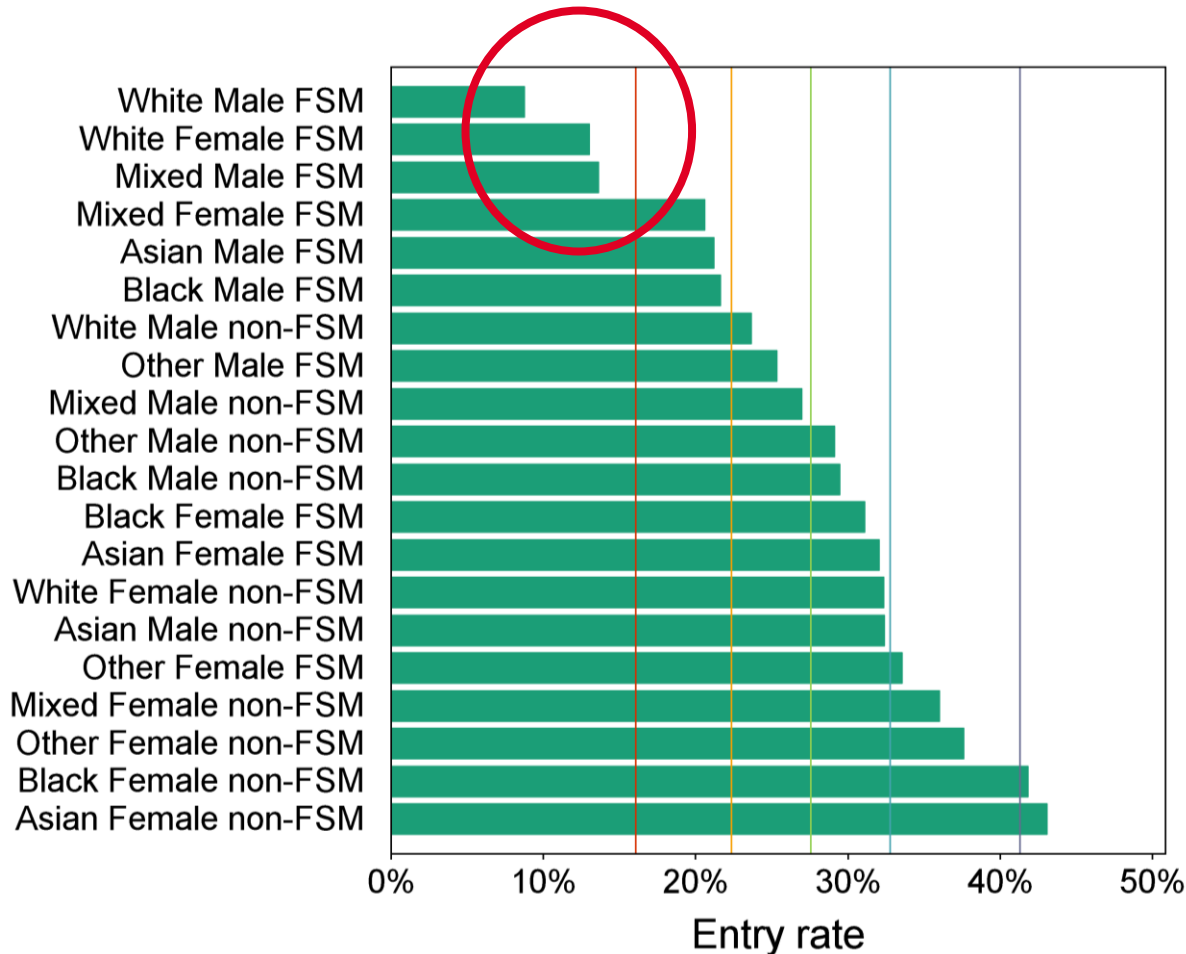
Free school meals



- Entry rate for FSM pupils is 16.5%.
- Not FSM twice as likely to enter HE than FSM.
- Gap remained constant in 2017.

Measuring equality

POLAR3 Q3 pupils

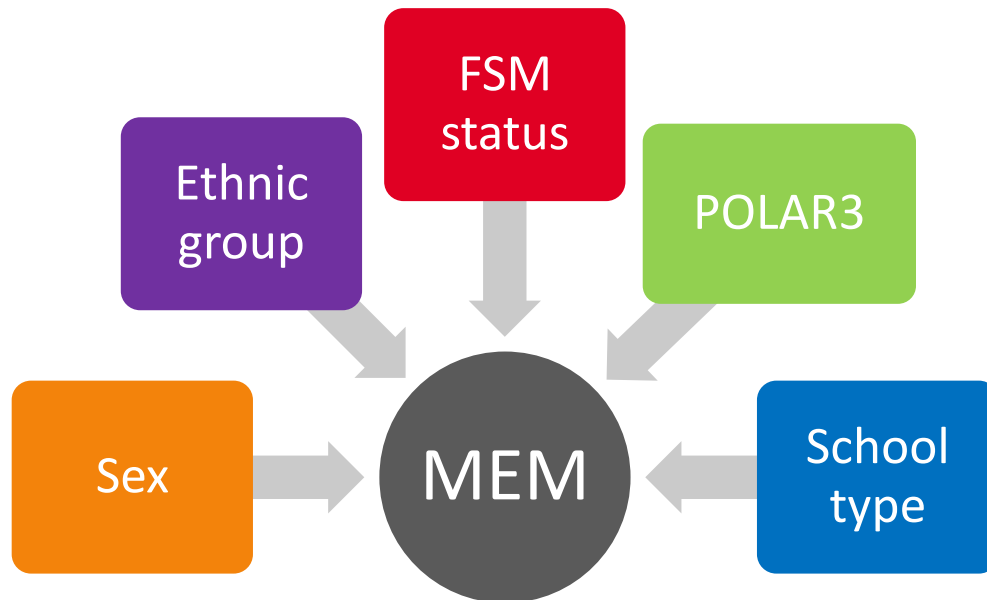


- Equality is a multi-dimensional problem.
- Only considering single dimensions results in blind spots.
- Subgroups of pupils who are highly disadvantaged being missed.

Measuring equality

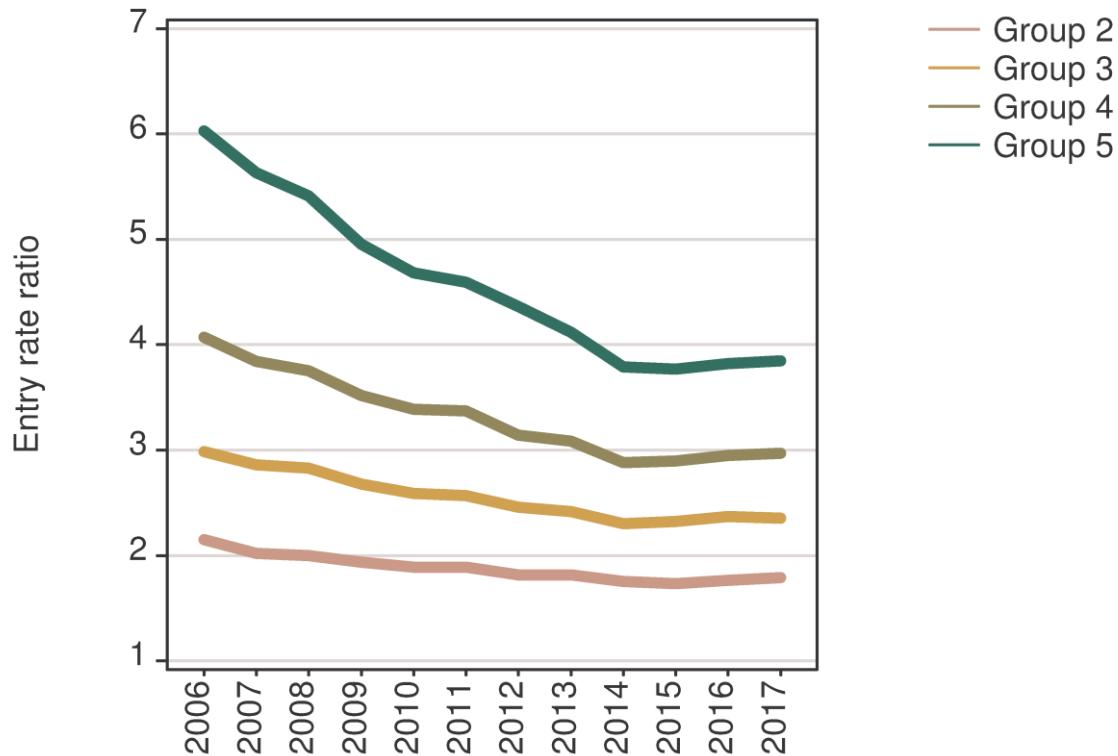
Multiple equality measure (MEM)

Using statistical modelling, a range of equality dimensions are combined to create an entry probability – **the multiple equality measure (MEM)**.



Measuring equality

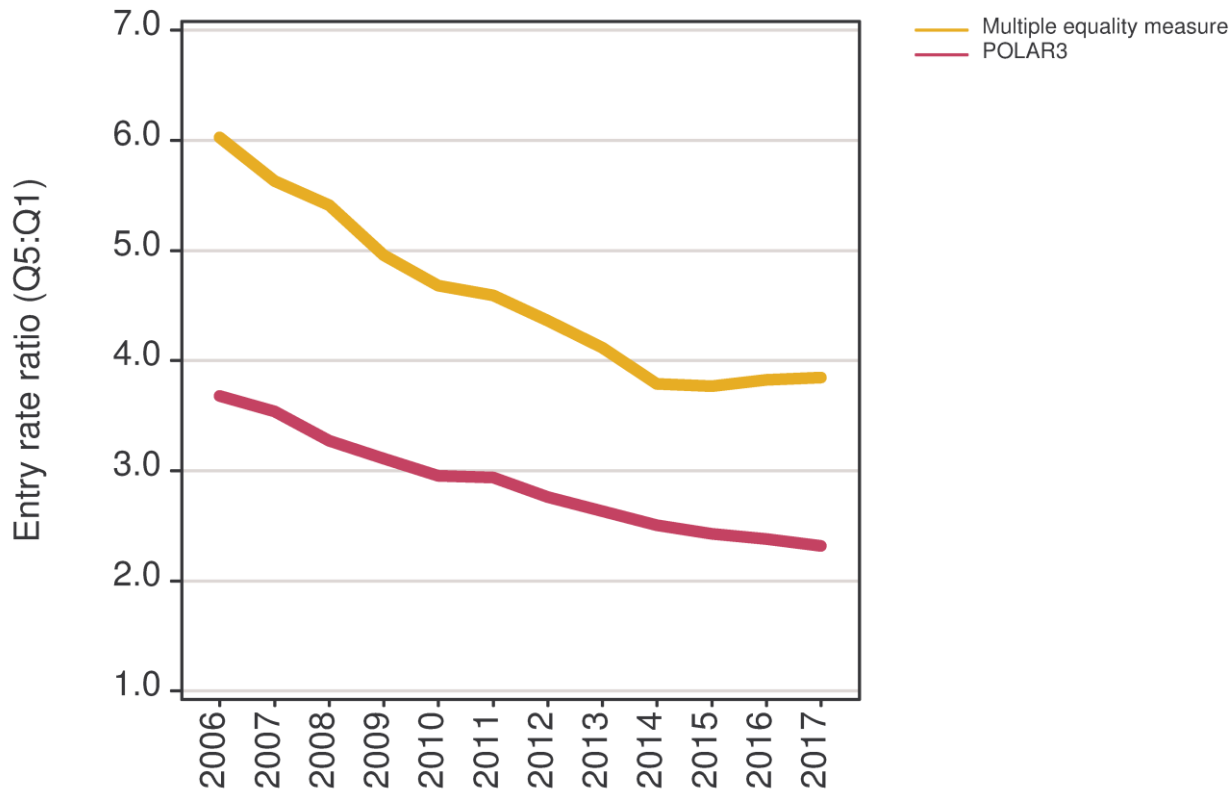
MEM



- MEM group 1 entry rate was 13.8%; group 5 53.1%.
- G5:G1 gap at 3.8.
- No progress made in reducing equality gap in three years.

Measuring equality

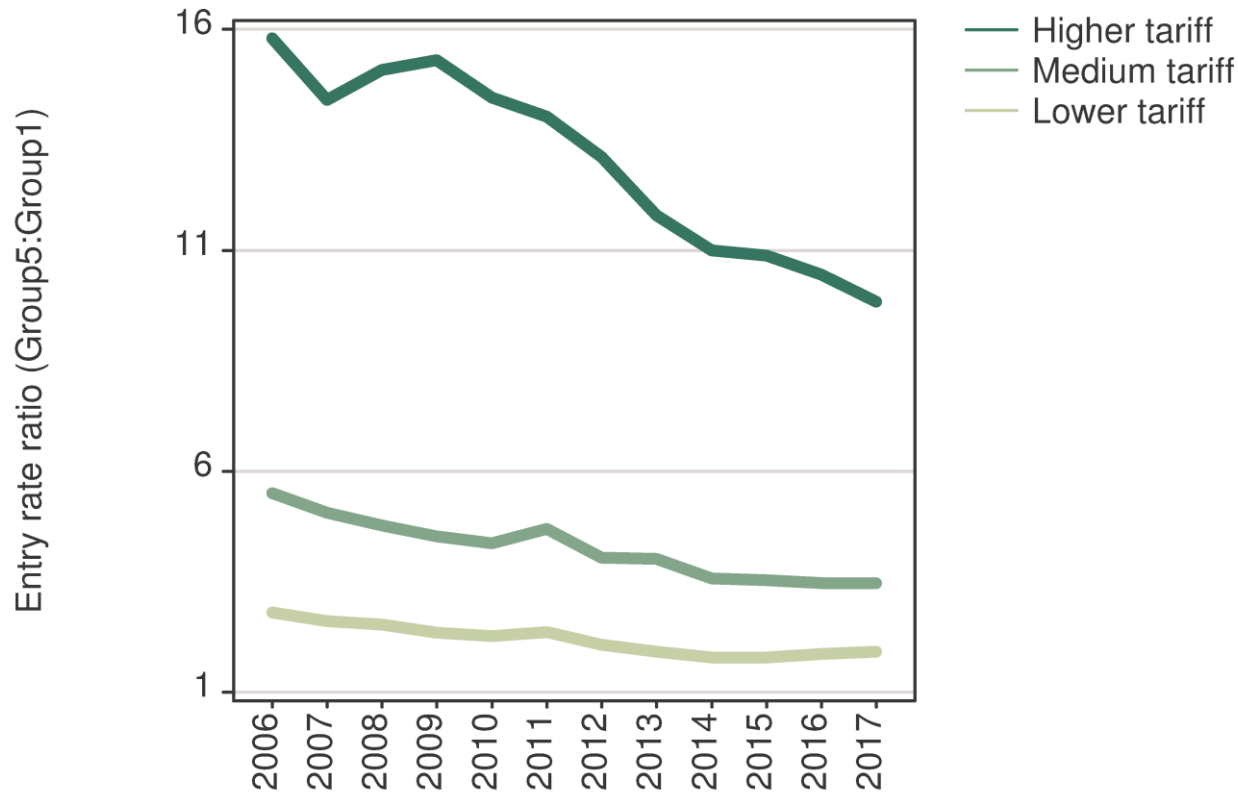
MEM vs POLAR3



- MEM ratio 3.8; POLAR3 ratio 2.3.
- MEM better at identifying disadvantage.
- POLAR3 shows progress still being made; MEM shows progress has stopped.

Measuring equality

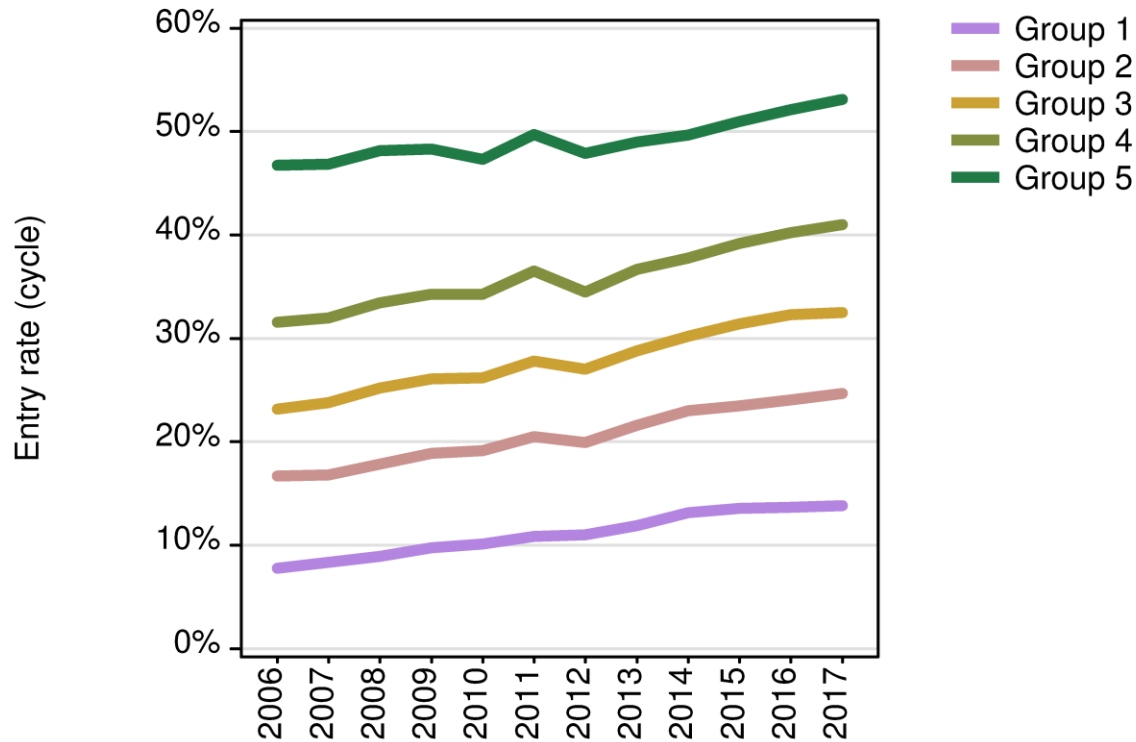
MEM



- Gap is greatest at higher tariff providers.
- Progress made in reducing this gap in 2017.
- No progress made at medium and lower tariff providers.

Measuring equality


MEM



- Want to make MEM the standard for equality in HE.
- Continue to report and produce comprehensive summary document.
- What would be required to achieve this?

A photograph of three students in a library setting. A young man with dark hair and a beard is smiling and looking at a laptop screen. A young woman with brown hair is leaning over his shoulder, also smiling and looking at the screen. A third person's head is visible on the left. In the background, there are shelves filled with books. A large red semi-transparent rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Contextual information and data'.

Contextual information and data



Contextual data
– links to
school/college/
local area



Contextual
information –
links to
individual
circumstances



More complete
picture of the
applicant

Support for contextualised admissions

- Questions in Apply – in addition to standard personal details and qualifications information, UCAS also gives applicants the opportunity to declare additional information, such as an impairment, or experience of the care system.
- Personal statement and reference – free text fields where further contextual information can be included.
- The UCAS contextual data service – data about an applicant's school/college and local area.
- [Work](#) with the Fair Education Alliance to raise awareness with teachers and advisers.
- Research to test the feasibility of using a novel means of contextualising admissions, using our multiple equality measure (MEM).



What more can we do?

Support
understanding
of MEM

Enhance equalities
release

Contextual data
service –
developments



Where to find

2017 End of Cycle report:

www.ucas.com/2017-end-cycle-report

MEM data explorer:

www.ucas.com/equality-and-entry-rates-data-explorers

2017 equality reports:

www.ucas.com/2017-entry-ucas-undergraduate-reports-sex-area-background-and-ethnic-group