

# Working Class Heroes -

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**Understanding access to higher education for white students from lower socio-economic backgrounds**

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**A National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) report**

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# **Executive Summary**

## **1. Background**

This report takes an in-depth look at how the participation of white students from areas of low higher education (HE) participation varies by HE provider in England. It also revisits the issue first examined in the 2016 NEON report 'About a Boy,'<sup>1</sup> i.e. how are HE providers supporting increases in participation amongst this group of learners. The aim is not to present the issues concerning HE participation by this group as more important than challenges facing other ethnic groups, but to understand better the interaction of proxy measures of socio-economic background, gender and ethnicity and how they impact on participation in HE.

## **2. What is the problem?**

White young people in receipt of free school meals (FSM) are the least likely, next to those from Gypsy/Roma backgrounds, of any group to enter HE. White students make up the majority of those in areas where HE attendance is the lowest. These are referred to as 'low participation neighbourhoods' (LPN)<sup>2</sup>.

## **3. What are the key findings of the study?**

There is huge variability in the participation of the group across higher education providers in England. Exciting work is being undertaken to address this challenge but the strategic commitment to it also appears variable.

- **Most white students from LPN attend larger 'post 1992' universities**

Over 70% of all white students from LPN backgrounds attend these universities.

- **But white students are found in the highest percentages in further education colleges**

The number of white students from LPN is approaching 50% of the whole student body in some colleges.

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<sup>1</sup> Webster, M & Atherton, G, (2016) About a Boy: The challenges in widening access to higher education for white males from disadvantaged backgrounds, London: National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)

<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/About-a-Boy-The-challenges-in-widening-access-to-higher-education-for-white-males-from-disadvantaged-backgrounds.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The participation of local areas (POLAR) classification groups 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 aged 18 or 19 years old. This analysis is based on the lowest quintile 'low participation neighbourhoods'.

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- **Big differences in levels of participation for white students from LPN exist by HE provider**

In over 50% of university providers less than 5% of their students are white and from LPN backgrounds. If these providers raised the level of participation of HE in their institutions to 5% there would be nearly 10,000 more white students from LPN backgrounds studying in HE.

- **Big differences in the chances of white students from LPN being accepted exist by HE provider**

Of all applications to HE by students from this background, only 22% are accepted. The chances of being accepted differ greatly by provider, with over 50% of universities accepting less than 20% of the applications they receive from these students.

- **Strategic commitment to supporting participation for this group is low**

Despite many universities only admitting a very small number of these students (and some admitting none at all), less than 20% of HEIs have targets in their Access and Participation Plans (APP)<sup>3</sup> related to white students from LPN.

- **More are trying to address the needs of the group than 3 years ago, but there are limitations in what access work alone can achieve**

More than 90% of respondents to our HE provider survey are engaged in work to support the progression of this group of students to HE, which is an increase from 40% in the NEON survey of 2016. However, those delivering this work understand that there are limitations to what they can do and they see this as their biggest challenge. The relationship between education and white lower socio-economic communities is a complex one and to re-orientate it requires long term work to address social and economic inequality.

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<sup>3</sup> All higher education providers who register with the Office for Students, the regulator for HE in England have to provide an Access and Participation Plan which outlines how they will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education.

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- **Most HE providers do not target outreach work explicitly at this group**

Over 70% of those who responded to the survey are trying to ensure that existing projects reach students from this background. Less than 40% were doing work specifically with male students and less than 12% with female students.

*'We recognise that, similar to Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) learners, white males are not a homogeneous group, and, as part of our review, we plan to use the year ahead to understand better the nuances within this group of students – considering factors such as nationality, ethnicity, geographic location, cultural identity and prior educational experience.'*

**University of Sussex**

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## 4. Recommendations

This report suggests that wider and deeper reform at the systemic level is necessary if participation of white students from lower socio-economic groups (SEG) in HE is going to increase.

### **Recommendation 1:** Set specific targets for white students from lower SEG entering HE

There are no national targets with regard to the participation of this group of learners in HE, and of equal concern hardly any provider level targets. In the context of the outcome driven approach to access and participation being promoted by the regulator for HE, the Office for Students, if something is not seen as an outcome or target then it will not be prioritised.

### **Recommendation 2:** Re-define widening participation target groups

Any effective targets would require the re-definition of widening participation target groups. It is essential that either we move beyond the existing POLAR to a more multi-faceted measure, and/or re-calibrate how POLAR quintiles are defined to bring all higher education providers performance into focus where all under-represented groups are concerned. London has less than 13 LPN areas which means that many students from the capital from lower SEG are hidden from view. It also means it is not possible to understand how large numbers of providers are really performing with regard to white students from lower SEG backgrounds.

### **Recommendation 3:** Ensure National of Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) investment continues after 2020-21

The survey suggested that many of the examples of more intensive work in this area, were being delivered by the NCOP<sup>4</sup>. There are indications that NCOP funding will decline considerably after 2021. HE providers will need to step up their investment in the early 2020s if widening access activities with this group are to continue and progress is to be made here. This is not likely if there are few targets with relation to the group in their Access and Participation Plans.

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<sup>4</sup> The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to deliver outreach programmes to young people in years 9 to 13. Their work is focused on local areas where higher education participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there.

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**Recommendation 4:** Focus equally on working class male and female students

There was only one example provided in the survey of activities specifically targeted at white female students from LPN. The data shows that the participation of white female students from lower SEG is HE is still well below average. If there is to be an explicit focus on white students from lower socio-economic groups, it should be on all students from both genders.

**Recommendation 5:** A national initiative to address the educational performance of white learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds

This is a challenge that HE outreach work alone cannot address, but it can play a crucial and important role. The best way for it to play this role is part of a large national commitment to addressing the educational performance of white learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Regional commitments, such as that recently undertaken in the north east<sup>5</sup>, are welcome but as the data analysed in this report shows this is a national issue. The Department of Education could be an effective enabler here supporting organisations from the HE sector committed to addressing HE participation to work together nationally and also establishing a national initiative engaging schools, colleges and the voluntary sector to address educational under-achievement of this group from early years onwards which HE can be part of.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-vision-for-boosting-social-mobility>



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# 1. Introduction

Higher education (HE) participation amongst white students has been a concern for policymakers and the higher education sector for a number of years now. This has led to a flow of research looking at the extent to which white working-class boys are under-represented in HE and what can or should be done about it<sup>6</sup>. From this work has come a range of possible measures to tackle this under-representation, and it has also motivated more recent research which casts some doubt on the relative extent of this problem anyway.<sup>7</sup>

It is fair to ask: do we need another report on this topic? Or indeed should we be really be focusing on it all? Some argue that the fundamental issue is socio-economic background anyway. By concentrating on white students only we turn attention away from the fundamental issues of economic inequality that cross ethnic boundaries. However, at the same time the evidence does show that, by proxy measures of socio-economic background, the participation of white students in HE is extremely low. It is important to better understand how low it is and how it differs across the sector. Doing this does not detract from the importance of economic inequality per se, it helps appreciate better how its impact is nuanced and differs across both the sector and the country.

This report sets out to both to take a more in-depth look at how the progression to HE for white students from areas of low HE participation varies by higher education provider in England and what providers can do to meet this challenge. It is crucial that if we are to make any progress in enabling more students from the group to advance to HE policy and practice are informed by realistic perspectives from those who are engaged in widening access work.

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<sup>6</sup> Hillman, N, & Robinson, N, (2016) *Boys to Men: The underachievement of young men in higher education – and how to start tackling it* Oxford: HEPI - <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Boys-to-Men.pdf>

Baars, S, Mulcahy, E, & Bernardes, E (2016) The underrepresentation of white working class boys in higher education The role of widening participation - <https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/The-underrepresentation-of-white-working-class-boys-in-higher-education-baars-et-al-2016.pdf>

Bulman, N, (2018) Number of white people accepted at universities drops despite overall rise in UK students 11<sup>th</sup> January 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/university-applications-ucas-white-british-students-bame-minority-working-class-tuition-fees-a8153621.html>

<sup>7</sup> Times Higher (2019) –Access Hurdles facing white working class males ‘overblown’

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/access-hurdles-facing-white-working-class-males-overblown>



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## 2. What is the problem?

The problem of low participation in HE by those from white lower socio-economic groups has become firmly rooted in the minds of policymakers. Or to be more precise the issue of the low HE participation of white boys from such groups has. The present Prime Minister has referred to the issue<sup>8</sup> and addressing it was made an explicit goal for the HE sector by the then Secretary of State for Higher Education in 2016<sup>9</sup>. In 2018 the present Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, when steering £24m into new work in the north east to address the educational under achievement of the group, stated that:

‘White British disadvantaged boys are the least likely of any large ethnic group to go to university. We need to ask ourselves why that is and challenge government, universities and the wider system to change that.’<sup>10</sup>

However, what is meant by lower socio-economic group in this context needs examination. There is evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies<sup>11</sup>, UCAS<sup>12</sup> and, more recently, the Department of Education which shows that white young people in receipt of free school meals (FSM), are the least likely, next to those from gypsy/roma backgrounds of any group, to enter HE<sup>13</sup>. The progression rates were 17.6% for females and 12.2% for males in 2016/17, as opposed those of Chinese pupils from free school meal backgrounds which is 79% and 64% respectively.

These low levels of participation are undoubtedly related to the relatively poor achievement of these groups in compulsory education. In 2016-17 only 17% of students from white FSM backgrounds achieved Level 5 in GCSE Maths and English<sup>14</sup>, as opposed to 35% of students from Asian backgrounds in receipt of FSM and 29% of Black young people from such backgrounds for example. Issues with achievement appear to start very early. The proportion of white Year 1 pupils from FSM backgrounds, meeting the expected standard of phonic decoding, is 13% lower than it is for black disadvantaged boys, and 23% lower than it is for

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<sup>8</sup> Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>

<sup>9</sup> Times Higher Education (2016) Universities told to focus on access for white working class boys, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/universities-told-focus-access-white-working-class-boys>

<sup>10</sup> Hinds, D (2018) Education Secretary sets vision for boosting social mobility, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-vision-for-boosting-social-mobility>

<sup>11</sup> Crawford, C, & Greaves, E, (2015) Ethnic minorities substantially more likely to go to university than their White British peers, London: Institute of Fiscal Studies, <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8042>

<sup>12</sup> UCAS (2018) MEM – technical report - October 2018 <https://www.ucas.com/file/190241/download?token=TrHwfBmw>

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education (2018) Widening Participation in Higher Education in England 2016-27 cohort, Experimental Statistics, London: Department of Education, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/757898/WP2018-ExperimentalText.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757898/WP2018-ExperimentalText.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Department of Education (2018) Attainment in English and Maths GCSE at grade 5 or above for children aged 14 to 16 (key stage 4), London: Department of Education <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/a-to-c-in-english-and-maths-gcse-attainment-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest>

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Asian disadvantaged girls.<sup>15</sup> However it has also been argued that the extent of the educational ‘problem’ for white working-class children may be being over-exaggerated.<sup>16</sup> The numbers of white children from FSM backgrounds is very small while 60% of adults consider themselves to be ‘working class’. The children of this far larger working-class group actually perform reasonably well in terms of educational outcomes<sup>17</sup>.

How exactly the HE participation of white students from lower socio-economic groups could be improved is not clear. A range of ideas were put forward in the 2016 report by the Higher Education Policy Institute<sup>18</sup> which looked at addressing HE participation by male students overall. These ideas included a take your son to university day and more male role models in widening participation work. More recently better information, advice and guidance and more engagement with parents and teachers have been argued for<sup>19</sup>. Our previous NEON report in 2016 pointed to several HEIs undertaking work using sport for an example as a lever to generate interest in higher education for working class boys, although sport doesn’t fit the needs of all young men. Much of this work though was at too early a stage to establish its impact.

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Education (2018) National curriculum assessments at key stage 1 and phonics screening checks in England, 2018, London: Department of Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-and-key-stage-1-assessments-england-2018/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-1-and-phonics-screening-checks-in-england-2018>

<sup>16</sup> Claire E. Crawford (2018): The one-in-ten: quantitative Critical Race Theory and the education of the ‘new (white) oppressed’, Journal of Education Policy, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2018.1531314

<sup>17</sup> Havergal, C. (2019) Access hurdles facing white working-class males ‘overblown’, Times Higher Education (08/01/19) retrieved from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/access-hurdles-facing-white-working-class-males-overblown>

<sup>18</sup> Hillman & Robinson (2016)

<sup>19</sup> Barr et al (2016)

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## 3. This study

The evidence presented in this study falls into four categories:

### 3.1 Secondary data on HE applications and acceptances

Using data from UCAS we have examined differences in application and acceptances in HE by individual provider, type of provider and location for white students from low participation neighbourhoods.

Our measure of applications is that of a unique application, at least one choice made through the UCAS main scheme, and thus excludes applications made through other means e.g. clearing or record of prior acceptance (where an institution provides an application to UCAS, in the instance that an unconditional offer has been accepted by the applicant).

The proxy measure of socio-economic background used therefore is Participation of Local Areas (POLAR)<sup>20</sup>. The POLAR measure has its limitations and its critics<sup>21</sup>. As a geographical measure it misses individual differences. It also does not allow much to be learnt about London in particular. The capital is classified as an almost universal 'high participation' area, thus the participation, or not, of white students who by other measures could be classified as coming from a lower socio-economic background cannot be examined using this data. Nevertheless, it remains the dominant metric at present by which the performance of higher education providers in terms of access and participation is measured and that which drives policy-making in this area. It is also the only available data at present that allows the performance of HE providers to be compared. The data used covers application/acceptance in HE by students of all ages who applied to HE via UCAS in 2017.

In the analysis below lowest participation neighbourhoods or LPN are students from the POLAR quintile 1 areas.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The participation of local areas (POLAR) classification groups 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 aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile one shows the lowest rate of participation. Quintile five shows the highest rate of participation.

<sup>21</sup> McCaig, C & Harrison, N (2015). An ecological fallacy in higher education policy: the use, overuse and misuse of 'low participation neighbourhoods'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39 (6), 793-817

<sup>22</sup> The data on both applications and acceptances, of students aged 17-65, presented in the report from each HE provider is rounded to the nearest 5. Where the number of applications or acceptances is less than five, it is rounded down to zero. These 'disclosure controls' – rounding up to five or down to zero – are in place to ensure that no one individual is identifiable from the data.

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### **3.2 Survey of HE providers & other organisations working with this group**

The online survey was conducted between December 2018 and February 2019. It looked at the views of HE providers regarding participation in HE by this group and also what activities if any they were undertaking to support participation of the group in HE. The survey was completed by 60 organisations.

### **3.3 Analysis of Access and Participation Plans (APPs)**

The APPs for 124 HEIs for 2019-20 were reviewed to identify where in these plans targets existed related to white students from lower socio-economic groups. This information was taken from the plans published on the Office for Students website.

### **3.4 Provider case studies**

In order to better understand how providers are working to support participation in HE of this group, we have taken a more in depth look at the work of two different organisations. These providers are very contrasting in nature but either admit relatively high numbers of white students from lowest participation neighbourhoods (LPN) or appear via our survey to be undertaking significant amounts of work with this group.

## 4 Looking at the data

As outlined above white young people who are eligible for FSM are the least likely of any group to attend HE. It also appears that white students make up the vast majority of those who progress to HE from the LPN areas.

### 4.1 The national picture

Diagram 1 shows participation of white students from LPN by the region which the higher education provider is located. The relative lack of white learners from LPN attending London institutions reflects to a considerable extent the small numbers of low participation neighbourhoods in the capital. London is almost universally a ‘high participation neighbourhood’ area. This relative lack of LPN areas in the capital also accounts in large measure for why the percentage of students attending HE from LPN areas are, in the main, white. London has very high numbers of students who are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds but they do not live in LPN designated areas. Some would undoubtedly be classified as from a lower socio-economic background by any other measure. Equally over 20,000 white young students from London go onto HE every year and they are missed out almost entirely here<sup>23</sup>.

In terms of the distribution of white LPN students across other areas, the noticeable finding is that by far the majority of these students entering HE are doing so through providers in the North West. The North West does not have the largest number of low participation neighbourhoods<sup>24</sup> but it has a relatively large number of providers<sup>25</sup> and more of the kind of providers who, as we shall see, admit the most of these students.

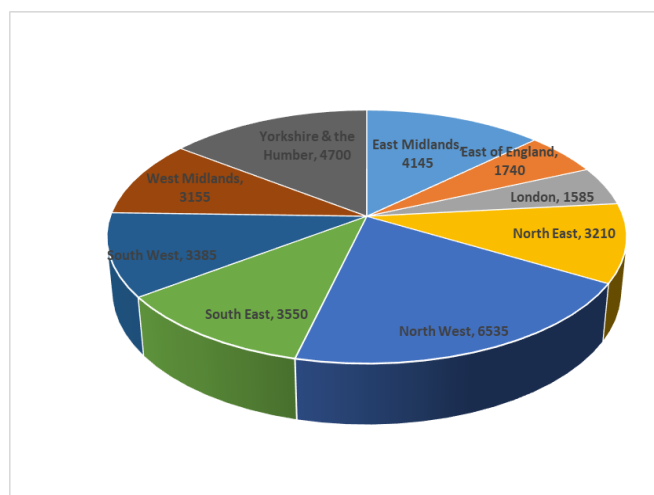


Diagram 1: Acceptances by region

As well as differences by region, considerable differences between types of providers also exist.

<sup>23</sup> Atherton, G, & Mazhari, T (2018) **Preparing for hyper-diversity: London’s Student Population in 2030** - <https://www.accesshe.ac.uk/preparing-for-hyper-diversity-londons-student-population-in-2030/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180322111559/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201729/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/file/129971/download?token=mGS-b3F1>

**Diagram 2: Acceptances by provider type**

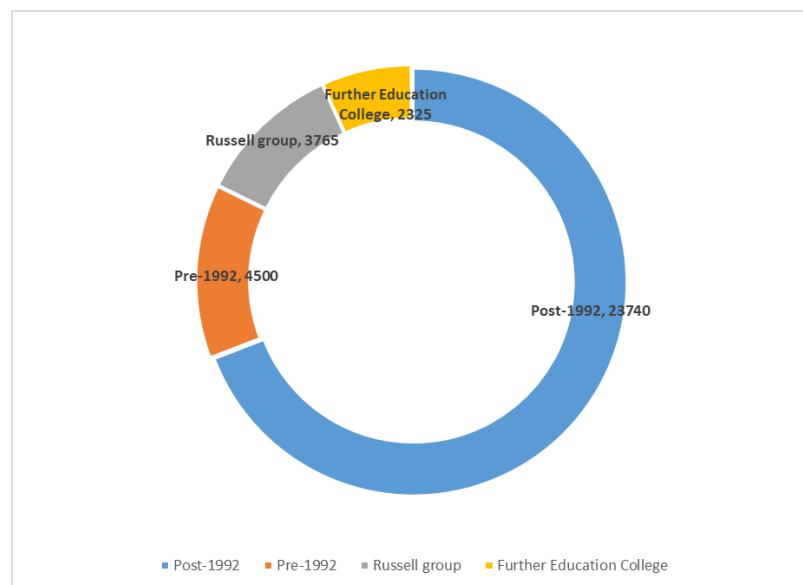


Diagram 2 shows how post-1992 institutions admit by far the largest numbers of white students from low participation neighbourhoods. Over 70% of white LPN students go to this type of institution. The contribution of the further education sector to widening access in this area is particularly noticeable.

## 4.2 Differences by providers – who is really doing the ‘heavy lifting’?

The dominance of the post 92 institutions, as shown above is in part a reflection of their size. They are in the main large providers of higher education. Tables 1a and 1b show the universities who admit the most, and least, students from this group<sup>26</sup>.

**Table 1a: Universities with the most acceptances of white students from LPN**

Order	Higher Education Institution	No of students
1	Sheffield Hallam University	1190
2	Liverpool John Moores University	1140
3	Teesside University	1120
4	Northumbria University	1000
5	Manchester Metropolitan University	875
6	Nottingham Trent University	830
7	Leeds Beckett University	780
	Staffordshire University	780
8	University of the West of England	740
	University of Salford	740

<sup>26</sup> Given the extremely low numbers of LPN areas in London universities based in London have been excluded from Table 1b.

**Table 1b: Universities with the least acceptances of white students from LPN**

Order	Higher Education Institution	No of students
1	Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester	0
2	Harper Adams University	35
3	University of Cambridge	85
3	The University of Bradford	85
4	Oxford University	90
4	Newman University, Birmingham	90
4	Aston University, Birmingham	90
4	Arts University Bournemouth	90
5	University of Bath	95
6	Norwich University of The Arts	105

The picture is a little different when acceptances of white students from low participation neighbourhoods as a percentage of all acceptances is considered. This measure controls somewhat for size of institution. Overall white students from LPN backgrounds make up 7.5% of all acceptances at English universities. Some of the better performing providers on this measure are not necessarily the largest ones. Tables 2a and 2b show data for both male and female applicants by this measure for those universities who have the highest percentage of students (2a) and the lowest percentage (2b). It shows that there are some providers who are far higher than the sector average and some who are far lower. As with Table 1b, London universities are excluded from Table 2b.

**Table 2a: Universities with the highest percentage of acceptances of white students from LPN as a percentage of students of all student acceptances**

	Male students		Female students	
	Higher Education institution	% of students	Higher Education institution	% of students
1	Bishop Grosseteste University	28	Teesside University	30
2	Teesside University	24	University of Sunderland	30
3	University of Sunderland	22	Staffordshire University	24
4	Plymouth Marjon University (St Mark & St John)	21	University of Suffolk	23
5	Staffordshire University	20	University of Hull	21
6	University of Suffolk	19	Northumbria	18
7	York St. John University	18	University of Chester	18
8	Norwich University of the Arts	17	Bishop Grosseteste University	17
9	University of Lincoln	16	University of Lincoln	17
10	Leeds Trinity University	15	Leeds Trinity University	16



**Table 2b: Universities with the lowest percentage of acceptances of white students from LPN as a percentage of students of all student acceptances**

	<b>Male students</b>		<b>Female students</b>	
	<b>Higher Education institution</b>	<b>% of students</b>	<b>Higher Education institution</b>	<b>% of students</b>
<b>1</b>	The University of Bradford	2.00	University of Cambridge	2.40
<b>2</b>	University of Bedfordshire	2.07	University of Bath	2.41
<b>3</b>	University of Bristol	2.33	Oxford University	2.75
<b>4</b>	The University of Warwick	2.42	Aston University	2.80
<b>5</b>	University of Surrey	2.46	University of Bristol	2.88
<b>6</b>	University of Cambridge	2.48	The University of Warwick	2.97
<b>7</b>	University of Reading	2.57	University of Leicester	3.05
<b>8</b>	Aston University	2.61	Durham University	3.14
<b>9</b>	Oxford University	2.71	The University of Manchester	3.58
<b>10</b>	University of Bath	2.74	Buckinghamshire New University	3.64

As can be seen while there is a significant difference in acceptances by gender, which given the gap overall between male and female participation in HE is not surprising, the leading institutions do not differ greatly. The leading providers in Table 2a differ significantly from those in Table 1a though. Universities such as Suffolk, Plymouth Marjon and Bishop Grosseteste appear here as leading performers here who are much smaller providers than those who dominate Table 1a. With Table 2b the importance of geography and the distribution of LPN areas is still relevant, with some of the universities in this table who recruit more students local to their institutions being located in areas where there are less white students in LPN areas.

In terms of acceptances of white LPN students as percentage of all acceptances however, it is further education colleges who really lead the way. Table 3 (on page 17) shows the top 10 providers in this measure in the further education sector. They admit far more students from white LPN backgrounds as a percentage of their intake than the leading university performers. Some colleges having a student body where almost half of the students are white are from LPN areas.

**Table 3: Acceptances of white students from LPN as a percentage of students of all student acceptances for students studying HE courses in Further Education Colleges (FECs)**

Rank	Further Education College	%
1	University Centre Grimsby	48
2	University Campus Barnsley	43
3	City of Sunderland College	40
4	Dearne Valley College	38
5	Cleveland College of Art and Design	32
6	Hugh Baird College	31
	Hull College	31
7	Chesterfield College	29
	Blackpool and Fylde College	29
8	College of West Anglia	26
9	Sheffield College	24
10	Blackburn College	23

In Table 3a below, the level of acceptances as a percentage of all applications, is examined. This measure tells us something about how likely it is that those who apply will be accepted into HE at different providers. As Table 3a & b show the leading performing universities in terms of converting applications to acceptances are a little different to those above, as are those who accept the lowest percentage of applications.

**Table 3a: Universities with highest percentage of acceptances of white students from LPN as a percentage of all applications of white students from LPN**

Male students			Female students		
	Higher Education Institution	%		Higher Education Institution	%
1	Bishop Grosseteste University	64		University of Suffolk	52
2	Plymouth Marjon University (St Mark & St John)	54		Bishop Grosseteste University	51
3	Teesside University	49		University College Birmingham	44
	Staffordshire University	49		Teesside University	43
4	University of Suffolk	47		Canterbury Christ Church University	38
5	Canterbury Christ Church University	39		Staffordshire University	37
6	Norwich University Of The Arts	38		University of Sunderland	36
7	Plymouth University	37		University of Hull	36
8	The University of Hull	33		Plymouth University	36
	Northumbria University	33		Falmouth University	34
	University of Sunderland	33		The University of Gloucestershire	32
9	Anglia Ruskin University	32		University of Bolton	31
10	Sheffield Hallam University	31			

**Table 3b: Universities with lowest number of acceptances of white students from LPN as a percentage of all applications of white students from LPN**

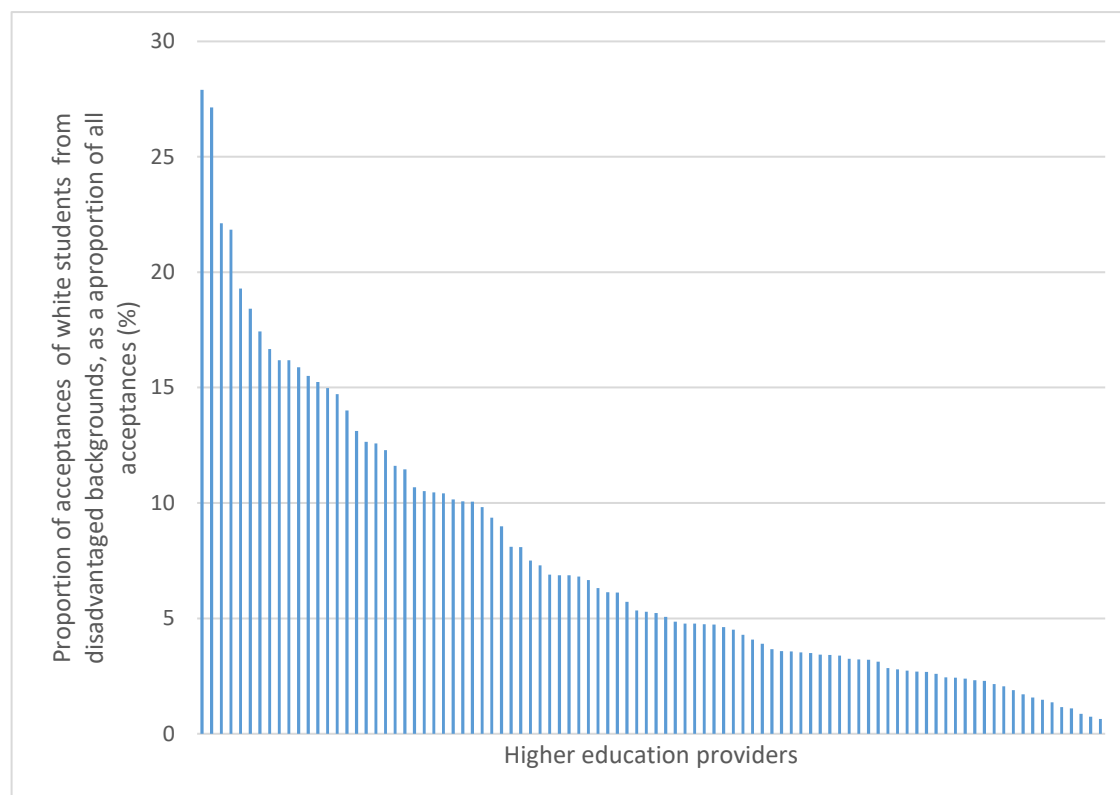
	<b>Male students</b>		<b>Female students</b>	
	<b>Higher Education institution</b>	<b>% of students</b>	<b>Higher Education institution</b>	<b>% of students</b>
<b>1</b>	Leeds Arts University	6.25	The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	3.70
<b>2</b>	The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	8.00	The University of Manchester	8.29
<b>3</b>	The University of Bradford	8.51	University of Surrey	9.89
<b>4</b>	The University of Bedfordshire	9.43	University of Bath	11.00
<b>5</b>	University of Surrey	9.90	University of Bristol	11.25
<b>6</b>	University of Birmingham	10.24	University of Birmingham	11.52
<b>7</b>	University of Southampton	10.69	University of Leeds	12.14
<b>8</b>	The University of Manchester	10.81	University of York	12.14
<b>9</b>	University of Bath	11.00	Loughborough University	12.74
<b>10</b>	University of Bristol	11.11	Durham University	13.27

### **4.3 What would greater participation in HE for white LPN students look like?**

The picture emerging above is that there is real unevenness across the higher education sector in England where the participation of this group of students is concerned. Some of this is a result of the data used, and the distribution therefore of the group. This group of students appear like others from particular socio-economic/ethnic groupings, to go to higher education providers in their own area. But even given this there are differences between providers that may merit further examination. Diagram 3 (on page 19) shows acceptances of white students from LPN as a percentage of students of all student acceptances for all universities. It shows the huge variations in participation across all the university part of the HE sector.

The diagram shows that in 50% of universities less than 5% of students are white and from LPN backgrounds and in 70% of universities less than 10% of their students are white and from LPN backgrounds.

**Diagram 3: Acceptances of white students from LPN as a % of all applications of white students from LPN for all Higher Education Institutions**



The diagram suggests that if we could get all universities to increase the number of students from white LPN backgrounds entering HE to a minimum threshold then this could significantly increase the numbers of white LPN learners entering HE.

The result of such an increase in numerical terms is shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Changes in HE participation by performance**

Change in performance	Additional number of students
All HEIs admit a minimum of 5% of white LPN student	9544
All Post 1992 institutions admit white LPN students at the average level for the institutional group	6260

Many of these institutions under the 5% level in Table 1 are based in London and, as was outlined above, this presents a challenge in terms of progress when using POLAR as it is presently constructed. But even if we take London out, and the remaining institutions (many of whom are large, more research intensive ones) reached the relatively modest 5% threshold then there would be an additional 5473 white students from LPN in HE.

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We also undertake some modelling regarding how participation in HE by those from white LPN would change if all post 92 institutions reached the present average performance of this grouping. It shows that there is room for improvement even in the parts of the sector that perform relatively well.

Appendix 1 contains the data for all higher education providers in England for number of acceptances of white LPN students, acceptances as a percentage of all acceptances and acceptances as a percentage of all applications.

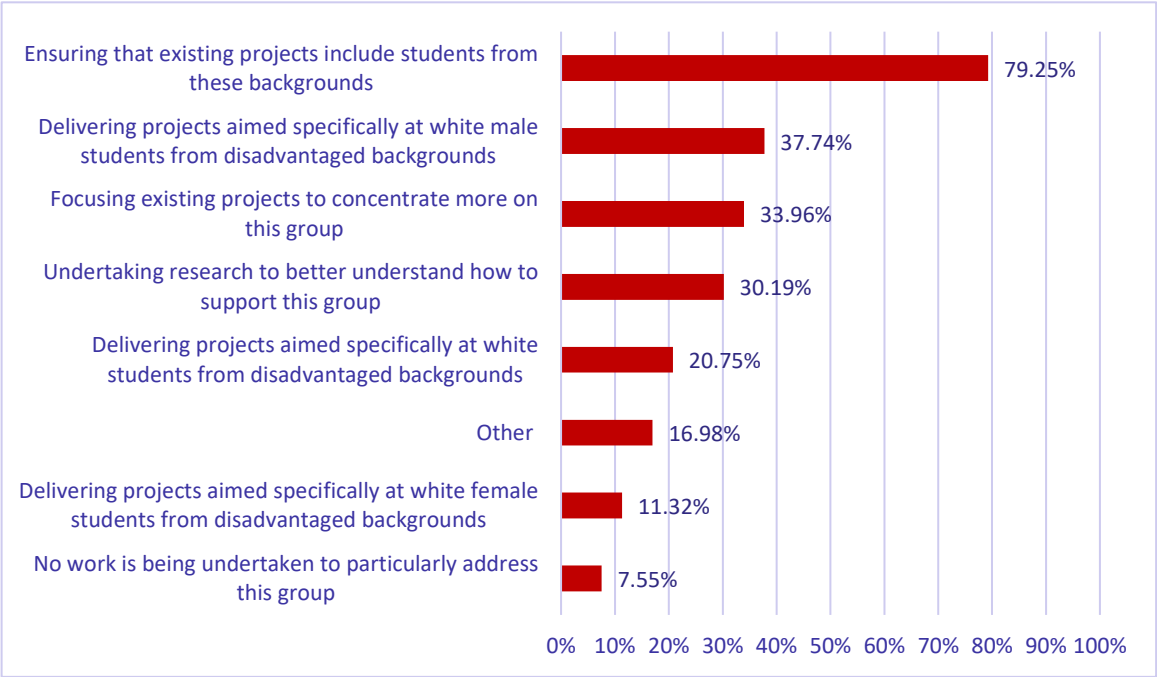
# 5 HE provider survey

One of the aims of this report was to see if there had been ‘progress’ in the extent to which providers were supporting HE participation amongst white students from lower socio-economic groups, compared to the survey we conducted in 2016. This is a difficult task, as different organisations completed the survey in comparison to 2016, but there are some encouraging signs.

## 5.1 Work with white students from ‘lower socio-economic groups’ has increased

As Diagram 4 below shows, less than 10% of respondents stated that they were doing no work at all related this group.

**Diagram 4: How is your institution (organisation) working to increase participation, retention and success in HE by white students from lower income or low participation backgrounds?**

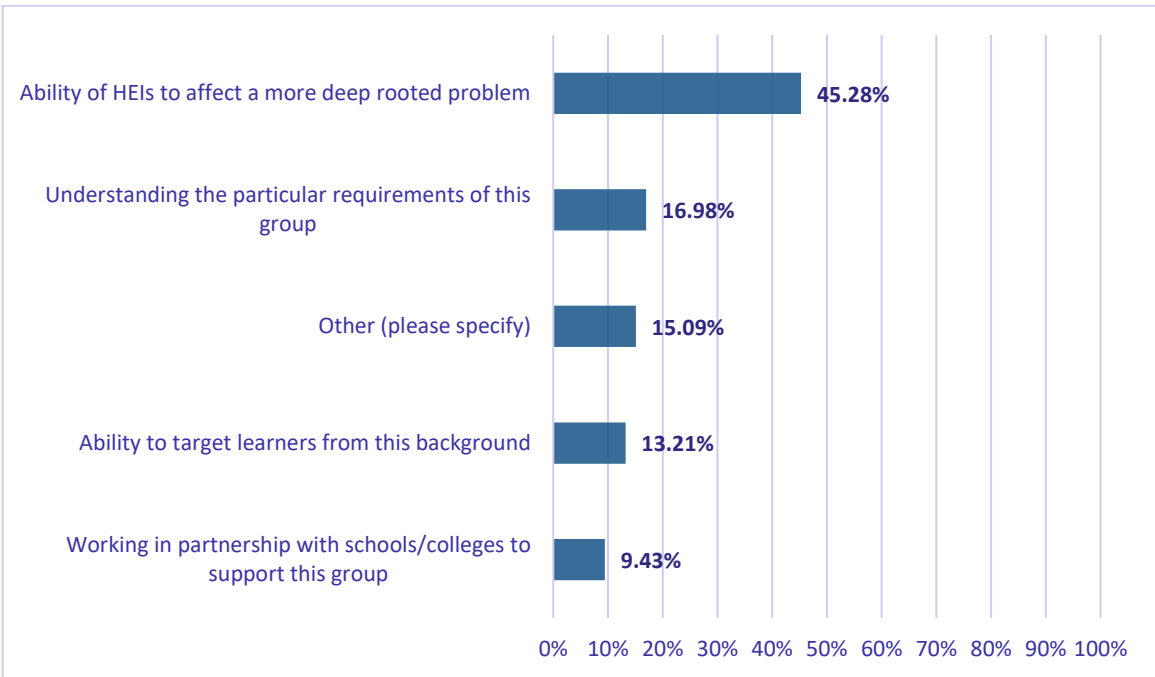


In the 2016 NEON survey, which was a smaller one, more than 50% of respondents were not undertaking work specifically to meet the focusing on the needs of this group via their widening access work. This a self-selecting sample of course, and there may be reticence from those not engaged in work with this group to complete such a survey. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that significant numbers of those involved in HE widening access work are committing to this agenda.

## 5.2 Can widening access have an impact?

However, while the evidence above is positive, the challenges in making an impact are real and significant and here there are some closer similarities with the 2016 survey. By some way the challenge mentioned most frequently is that connected to the broader inequalities that frame this group’s participation, or non-participation, in HE as Diagram 5 below shows.

**Diagram 5: What are your biggest challenges in working to increase participation, retention and success in HE by white students from lower income or low participation backgrounds?**



As respondents stated in the survey:

*‘There are many issues relating to this issue - it is a societal issue which requires input from a wide range of organisations, not just one sector in HE.’*

**University of Chester**

*‘I’m generalising partly here but in West Yorkshire and in Leeds in particular these are long-term deep-rooted issues and go beyond the young person’*

**Leeds Networks of Collaborative Outreach Project (NCOP)**



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‘University outreach activity alone is unlikely to affect the change necessary to ensure that white disadvantaged students have the same outcomes as their more advantaged peers. This issue would require national investment, working in partnership with school leaders, businesses and local authorities to affect deep rooted change’.

**University of East Anglia**

Addressing these issues is seen as beyond the scope of the widening access community alone. It also requires a nuanced understanding of the relationship that the groups have with education.

‘One real challenge that we have is often breaking the attitudes of their main influencers, often influential males in the family. There is certainly a culture of "I never went and it didn't do me any harm" or "We can't afford that sort of money, it's a waste of time". But this is not to sneer at these attitudes. We also see a fear that their young people will move away, change, not be part of the tightly knitted communities any longer, won't be there for caring needs. There are genuine fears around finance.’

**Higher Horizons NCOP**

‘We recognise that, similar to Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) learners, white males are not a homogeneous group, and, as part of our review, we plan to use the year ahead to understand better the nuances within this group of students – considering factors such as nationality, ethnicity, geographic location, cultural identity and prior educational experience.’

**University of Sussex**

### **5.3 Moving beyond aspirations**

Highlighting the ambiguous, sometimes negative, relationship that exists between those from lower socio-economic groups and higher education is by no means new. However, what is noticeable from the survey, and this may be just a result of how the responses are phrased and nothing more, is a lack of reference to ‘aspiration’. The perceived need to ‘raise’ aspirations has underpinned the rationale for much of the widening access work in the last two decades. Yet evidence suggests that parents/carers from lower socio-economic groups do not lack educational aspirations they just have different types of aspiration.<sup>27</sup> It is encouraging to see that there may be a move on from the aspirations based agenda.

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<sup>27</sup> Cummings C, et al (2012) *Can changing aspirations and attitudes impact on educational attainment? A review of interventions* York: JRF  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-attainment-interventions-full.pdf>

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While there is explicit recognition that there are forces limiting the impact of widening access work, this does not mean there were not examples of initiatives being delivered by HE providers and other organisations operating in this space. Some of the leading work here is described in section 6 below.

Again though, as in the 2016 NEON report, there was a bias in the activities described toward boys and, where a targeted approach did exist, a concentration on sport. Activities described in the survey included work with professional football clubs, American football clubs and Rugby clubs. This did though include activities that used sport as a way into the development of a broader range of skills for young males, not just on sporting activity itself per se.

‘We run a project called ‘Careers in Sport’, which is a NCOP funding initiative spanning up to 15 engagements across one academic year. The project consists of three phases (one for each academic term) of the following structure:

- 1x in-school engagement (initially a focus group, but following sessions are around helping the students with things they are finding difficult as outlined in the focus group. For example. Public speaking, revision, wellbeing.
- Between 2 and 3 in-school curriculum enrichment sessions facilitated by MMU's Sports Scholars. The Sports Scholar run football sessions that teach the students the practical skills that are required as part of their BTEC First in Sport qualification.
- 1x campus visit focused on providing HE knowledge and connect sports to particular careers and therefore relevant subject areas. For example, sports nutrition, physiotherapy and sports performance, sports management/business.’

#### **Manchester Metropolitan University**

There was also an understanding that work with this group of students needed to be sustained and also involve more than sport:

‘We recognise that engaging with white working-class learners from lower socio-economic groups cannot always be through sport, so the programme includes a *number of events that focus on different areas of interest. Our year 9 ‘He Can We Can’ programme includes a creative futures day looking at art, graphic design and media, and our year 12 programme includes an “inside health” day which introduces students to the breadth of opportunities available in the health care sector where males are largely under-represented.*

#### **University of East Anglia**

### **5.4 A strategic commitment to this agenda?**

While the above increase in outreach activity by HE providers is encouraging there is less evidence of commitment at the more strategic level. We reviewed all APPs for HEIs and found that only 16% of them had any targets related to white students from lower socio-economic groups.

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Concerns over the depth of the commitment to an agenda such as this also came through in comments included in the survey.

'I would like to be able to put in place relevant programmes and activities aimed at this specific cohort. However, the WP budget has been drastically cut and there is no support from senior management for a properly thought through and strategic WP outreach programme. I'm hoping that the OfS will actually follow through on their consultation document so that senior management at the University will have to implement and fund a WP programme in keeping with its size and cohort of students.'

Widening Participation Lead from large post 1992 institution

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## 6 Case studies

In this section two examples of the work being undertaken to widen access to HE for white students from LPN backgrounds are described. The first case study is led by one of the 29 regional NCOP consortia and uses football as a vehicle to help students develop presentational and other skills. The second case study looks not at one specific initiative but the range of things that one of leading further education colleges in the country in terms of admitting white students from LPN areas are doing in this area.

### **North East Collaborative Outreach Programme – The FutureMe Challenge**

This programme is a collaboration between the North East Collaborative Outreach Programme and the three local football clubs in the North East. The Challenge combines the work of the Premier League Core Programme and FutureMe higher education workshops which are delivered by the Foundation teams of Sunderland FC (Foundation of Light), Middlesbrough FC Foundation and Newcastle United Foundation. The programme involves working with young boys from low participation backgrounds – whom are primarily white due to the demographics of the area – to enhance their understanding of higher education, enhance their public speaking skills, assist them in meeting deadlines and to provide them with a professional experience of the world of work. In 2018 participation was spread across the North East reaching 200 pupils from 17 schools.

The FutureMe challenge was to create an advertising and marketing campaign to encourage boys into higher education. Students took part in 10 hours of in-school sessions to develop their campaign and then presented it to a panel of judges at one of the stadiums of the clubs involved in the project as part of a celebration event. Students from schools in the same area competed with one another to have their poster advertised digitally (on billboards) in their area. During the celebration event students had the opportunity to reflect upon the skills and knowledge which they had gained, as well as hear from local sporting stars who had attended higher education and the impact this has had on their career. Following the celebration events, the winner from each area was selected by an independent panel of strategic stakeholders to choose the Regional FutureMe Enterprise Champion. This team then created a radio show talking about their experiences of the challenge which was broadcast on Spark Sunderland radio. Around 15% more students reported they would consider higher education after participating in the programme. Post-programme comments in the survey conversations with students, unveiled their increased sense of confidence in their academic ability and greater clarity regarding what they wanted to do in the future.

FutureMe Enterprise Challenge 2019 – In 2019, students will be recruited from a much larger pool, across the North East. Students will be asked to create a storyboard suitable for a 30 second YouTube advertisement aimed at encouraging their male peers to consider higher education in the North East. The winner of each area final will have their storyboard professionally adapted into a comic book/strip and will then be entered into a Regional Competition in which the champion will produce the YouTube advert.

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### **Blackpool & Fylde College – Supporting progression across the college**

Blackpool & Fylde College is a further and higher education provider in Blackpool, Lancashire. It is among the top ten further education colleges most likely to accept white students from LPN areas as shown in Table 3. They are working in a number of ways to support progression to the college from local learners, many of whom live in what is a predominantly white area where rates of HE participation are significantly below the national average.

One particular group the college is working with is young carers. They are delivering a programme which aims to enable these young people to effectively recognise and build on the strengths which they have gained through caring such as time-management, leadership and organisation. It includes including assisting the cohort in creating podcasts about their own lives and is based around the STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Result) approach. There are 15 students, aged 14-19, participating in the programme with two-thirds of the cohort in compulsory schooling and one-third in attendance of Blackpool and The Fylde College. Students come together once every fortnight for an hour.

As well as specific activities such as those with young carers the college had put significant focus on their information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision. Level 3 students receive information on future pathways to employment and higher education at least six times a year, ensuring pathways through which young people can progress to their desired careers are clear to them. In this IAG work the college have placed a huge emphasis on myth-busting, particularly around the process of tuition fee repayments, which is reported to be a huge sway for young people in their decision to consider higher education. Information provision related to technology and football, has also proven to be a successful means of engaging students in discussions on HE progression.

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## 7 Key Findings

The main conclusions emerging from the report are outlined below.

- **Most white students from LPN attend post 92 institutions**

Over 70% of all white students from LPN backgrounds attend these institutions.

- **But white students are found in higher percentages in further education colleges**

The number of white students from LPN is approaching 50% of the whole student body in some colleges.

- **Big differences in participation for white students from LPN exist by HE provider**

In over 70% of university providers less than 10% of their students are white and from LPN backgrounds and in 50% of providers less than 5% of their students are from this group.

- **Big differences in the chances of white students from LPN being accepted exist by HE provider**

Of all applications to HE by students from this background, only 22% are accepted. The chances of being accepted differ greatly by provider, with over 50% of universities accepting less than 20% of the applications they receive from these students.

- **Strategic commitment to supporting participation for this group is low**

As section 5.4 shows, less than 20% of HEIs have targets in their Access and Participation Plans (APP) related to white students from LPN.

- **Most HE providers do not target outreach work explicitly at this group**

Over 70% of those who responded to the survey are trying to ensure that existing projects reach students from these backgrounds.

- **More are trying to address the needs of the group than 3 years ago, but there are limitations in what access work alone can achieve**

More than 90% of respondents to our HE provider survey are engaged in work to support the progression of this group of students to HE, which is an increase from 40% in the NEON survey of 2016. However, those delivering this work understand that there are limitations to what they can do. The relationship between education and white lower socio-economic communities is a

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complex one and to re-orientate it requires long term work to address social and economic inequality.



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## 8 Recommendations

This study would support the findings of other studies with regard to how to affect participation in HE by white students from lower socio-economic groups i.e. better engagement with parents, or improved information, advice and guidance and innovation in the area of university outreach. However, the analysis of the data undertaken and the responses to the survey suggests that wider and deeper reform at the systemic level is necessary if participation of this group in HE is going to increase. In this section five recommendations are made which could form the basis for such reform.

### **Recommendation 1: Set specific targets for white students from lower SEG entering HE**

There are no national targets with regard to the participation of this group of learners in HE, and of equal concern hardly any provider level targets. In the context of the outcome driven approach to access and participation being promoted by the Office for Students, if something is not seen as an outcome or target then it won't be prioritised. As outlined above if all HEIs could reach a minimum level of 5% of their students coming from white LPN areas then an additional nearly 10,000 such students would be going onto HE.

### **Recommendation 2: Re-define widening participation target groups**

Any effective targets would require the re-definition of widening participation target groups. The drawbacks of the POLAR measure come through again in this study. It is essential that either we move beyond POLAR to a more multi-faceted measure, and/or re-calibrate how POLAR quintiles are defined to bring all higher education providers performance into focus where all under-represented groups are concerned. At present it is not possible to understand how large numbers of providers are really performing with regard to white students from lower SEG backgrounds. If outcomes is to drive widening access work in England in the 2020s then the data upon which they are based needs to be appropriate.

### **Recommendation 3: Ensure Networks of Collaborative Outreach (NCOP) investment continues after 2020-21**

Much of the more intensive work identified in the survey was being led by NCOP consortia rather than HEIs. This poses some questions regarding future activity in this area. It looks like NCOP funding will decline considerably after 2021. HE providers will need to step up their investment in the early 2020s if widening access activities with this group are to continue and progress is to be made here. This is not likely if there are few targets with relation to the group in their Access and Participation Plans.

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#### **Recommendation 4: Focus equally on working class male and female students**

There was only one example provided in the survey of activities specifically targeted at white female students from LPN. The majority of providers in the survey target do not explicitly target white students anyway, and many white female LPN students are picked up in the work that is delivered. However, there still appeared a focus toward male rather than female students. The data shows that the participation of white female students from lower SEG is HE is still well below average. If there is to be an explicit focus on white students from lower socio-economic groups, it should be on all students from both genders.

#### **Recommendation 5: A national initiative to address the educational performance of white learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds**

The survey does surface some exciting and innovative work underway with this group of students. But as the survey shows this is a challenge that outreach work alone cannot address, but it can play a crucial and important role. The best way for it to play this role is as part of a large national commitment to addressing the educational performance of white learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Regional commitments such as that recently undertaken in the north east are welcome but as the data analysed in this report shows this is a national issue. The Department of Education could be an effective enabler here supporting organisations from the HE sector committed to this issue to work together nationally, and then establishing a national initiative engaging schools, colleges and the voluntary sector which HE can link with.

# Appendix 1

Data for all higher education providers in England for number of acceptances of white LPN students, acceptances of white LPN students as a percentage of all acceptances and acceptances of white LPN students as a percentage of all applications.

	White LPN acceptances total	White LPN acceptances % all acceptances <sup>28</sup>	White LPN acceptances as % of applications <sup>29</sup>
Bishop Grosseteste University	135	19	54
University of Bolton	180	12	30
Bristol, University of the West of England (UWE)	740	11	25
University of Chester	625	17	21
Coventry University	415	5	24
University of Greenwich	210	5	20
Arts University Bournemouth	90	7	18
Bath Spa University	245	10	20
University of Bedfordshire	110	4	15
University College Birmingham	110	7	39
Bournemouth University	425	9	22
BPP University	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire New University	130	5	25
Canterbury Christ Church University	390	12	38
University of Chichester	215	15	28
University for the Creative Arts (UCA)	105	7	24
University of Cumbria	275	18	28
University of Derby	605	15	25
Edge Hill University	690	19	23
Falmouth University	165	8	33
The University of Gloucestershire	295	11	28
Harper Adams University	35	5	21

<sup>28</sup> - Rounded to whole number

<sup>29</sup> - Rounded to whole number

	White LPN acceptances total	White LPN acceptances % all acceptances	White LPN acceptances as % of applications
The University of Law (including De Broc School of Business)	35	7	21
Leeds Trinity University	135	16	16
Newman University, Birmingham	90	10	24
University of Northampton	200	7	19
Norwich University Of The Arts	105	13	32
University of Portsmouth	550	9	28
Queen Mary University of London	80	2	16
Ravensbourne	25	3	23
Robert Gordon University	60	2	21
University of Roehampton	75	3	24
Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester	0	0	0
St Mary's University, Twickenham, London	50	4	20
Staffordshire University	780	22	42
University of Sussex	190	4	18
University of the Arts London	155	3	16
The University of West London	65	2	17
University of Winchester	270	11	30
University of Worcester	415	13	28
York St John University	355	16	22
Liverpool Hope University	260	18	18
Anglia Ruskin University	375	10	24
Birmingham City University	475	7	17
University of Brighton	425	8	17
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)	720	13	26
De Montfort University	395	6	21
University of East London (UEL)	110	3	19
University of Hertfordshire	185	3	19
The University of Huddersfield	410	10	21
Kingston University	110	2	13
Leeds Beckett University	780	13	24
University of Lincoln	700	16	29
Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)	1140	16	27
London Metropolitan University	55	2	10
London South Bank University	110	3	17
The Manchester Metropolitan University	875	10	17
Middlesex University	85	2	14

Northumbria University	1000	16	31
	<b>White LPN acceptances total</b>	<b>White LPN acceptances % all acceptances</b>	<b>White LPN acceptances as % of applications</b>
Nottingham Trent University	830	10	28
Oxford Brookes University	225	5	20
Plymouth University	730	14	36
Sheffield Hallam University	1190	15	27
University of Sunderland	570	27	35
Teesside University	1120	28	45
University of Westminster, London	75	2	15
University of Wolverhampton	520	13	28
Southampton Solent University	305	11	29
Aston University, Birmingham	90	3	16
University of Bath	95	3	11
Birkbeck, University of London	5	0	5
The University of Bradford	85	3	12
Brunel University London	50	1	11
City, University of London	30	1	8
Courtauld Institute of Art (University of London)	0	0	0
University of East Anglia (UEA)	310	8	23
The University of Essex	225	5	19
University of Exeter	295	5	21
Goldsmiths, University of London	60	2	23
The University of Hull	725	17	35
Keele University	265	10	22
The University of Kent	285	5	22
Lancaster University	225	7	23
University of Leicester	150	4	15
Loughborough University	155	4	12
University of Reading	150	3	16
Royal Holloway, University of London	70	2	17
The University of Salford	740	13	27
SOAS University of London	0	0	0
St George's, University of London	5	1	4
University of Suffolk	345	22	51
University of Surrey	140	3	10
The University of Buckingham	10	5	22
SAE Institute	5	3	8
Pearson College London (including Escape Studios)	10	3	29

University of Birmingham	240	4	11
	<b>White LPN acceptances total</b>	<b>White LPN acceptances % all acceptances</b>	<b>White LPN acceptances as % of applications</b>
University of Bristol	165	3	11
University of Cambridge	85	2	22
Durham University	165	4	16
Imperial College London	30	1	13
King's College London (University of London)	70	1	10
University of Leeds	390	5	12
The University of Liverpool	465	8	18
London School of Economics and Political Science (University of London)	25	1	19
The University of Manchester	280	3	9
Newcastle University	355	6	17
The University of Nottingham	350	5	15
Oxford University	90	3	21
The University of Sheffield	340	6	17
University of Southampton	245	5	12
UCL (University College London)	45	1	9
The University of Warwick	135	3	14
University of York	290	6	14
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London	5	2	2
Leeds Arts University	45	7	13
The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts	20	8	5
Royal Veterinary College (University of London)	25	6	18
Plymouth Marjon University (St Mark & St John)	140	18	41