



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

## BIS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The proportion of 15 year olds from low income backgrounds in English maintained schools progressing to HE by the age of 19

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# The proportion of 15 year olds from low income backgrounds in English maintained schools progressing to HE by the age of 19

## Why is this indicator important?

Education and skills make an important contribution to economic growth. Addressing differences in educational opportunity can play a role in improving long term economic growth performance, particularly through raising employment rates.

Inequality often starts early in life and such inequalities extend to participation in higher education. Higher education can be a powerful engine of social mobility, enabling able young people from low-income backgrounds to earn more than their parents and providing a route into the professions for people from non-professional backgrounds. This indicator reflects the extent to which young people from low income backgrounds (measured by whether they have been eligible for Free School Meals) are progressing to Higher Education. Currently children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are much less likely to enter into higher education than other children. This means that the country is not making full use of all the talent that is available.

Promoting widening participation and raising educational aspirations for disadvantaged young people are key aims of the Social Mobility strategy: [Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers](#).

## How are we performing?

The latest data reflects the estimated percentage of maintained school pupils aged 15 in 2007/08 who progressed to HE by age 19 in 2011/12, by Free School Meal (FSM) status.

### Estimated percentage of maintained schools pupils aged 15 by Free School Meal status who entered HE by age 19

UK HE Institutions and English FE colleges

	Estimated % who entered HE			
	FSM <sup>[1]</sup>	Non-FSM <sup>[1]</sup>	Gap (pp) <sup>[2]</sup>	All
2005/06	13%	33%	19	30%
2006/07	14%	33%	19	31%
2007/08	15%	33%	18	31%
2008/09	17%	35%	18	33%
2009/10	18%	36%	18	34%
2010/11	20%	38%	18	33%
2011/12	21%	39%	18	36%

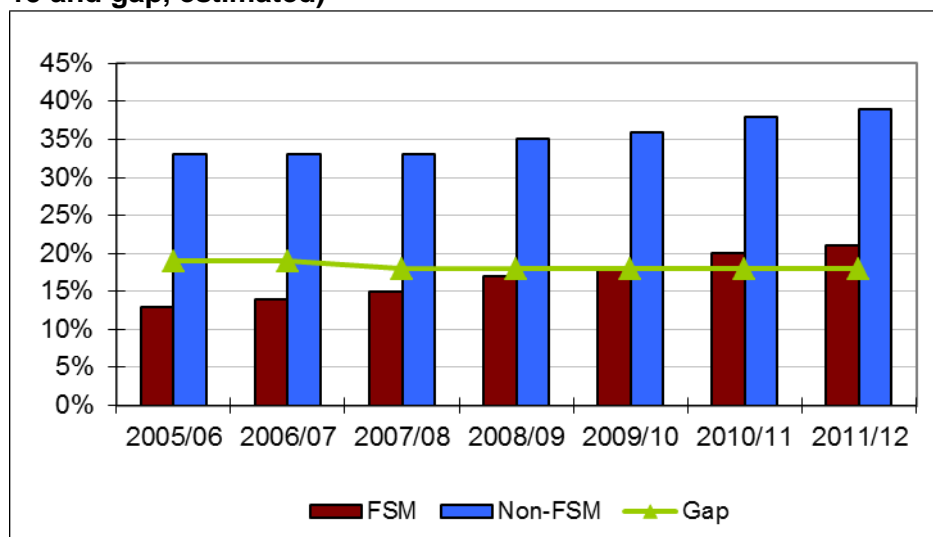
pp=percentage points

[1] FSM and Non-FSM refer to whether pupils were receiving Free School Meals or not.

[2] Gap is the difference between FSM and non-FSM expressed in percentage points. Percentage figures are rounded; gap figures are calculated from un-rounded data and therefore may not correspond to the gap between rounded percentages.

Data are available in the BIS [Widening Participation publication](#)

### Participation in Higher Education at age 19, England (FSM at age 15, Non-FSM at age 15 and gap, estimated)



The chart shows that the proportion of pupils with Free School Meals progressing to higher education is estimated to have increased steadily between 2005/06 and 2011/12. The estimated progression rate for pupils not receiving Free School Meals has risen between 2007/08 and 2011/12. The estimated gap between FSM and Non-FSM rates was 19 percentage points in 2005/06 and 2006/07 and has remained steady at 18 percentage points from 2007/08 to 2011/12. Data are not available before 2005/06.

### What will influence this indicator?

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower levels of attainment than their peers. This variation accounts from some of the gap in access to higher education. The Department for Education's [The Importance of Teaching](#) sets out the Government's vision of how attainment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can be supported to increase their chances of accessing higher education.

While attainment is important, it is not the only factor influencing access to higher education and young people's decisions about institutions and courses. Some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve qualifications that would allow them to attend a selective university are less likely to apply than their peers. Aspiration to attend higher education and understanding of the options available are also critical, these in turn are affected by giving young people access to high quality information, aspirational advice and guidance.

As the FSM population is influenced by the economic cycle, it may be difficult to distinguish between improvements that are attributable to the HE reforms and those that

reflect general economic conditions. For example a change in the level of unemployment could affect the number of people receiving Free School Meals and the number of pupils with FSM who progress to university.

## What is BIS's role?

BIS's Higher Education White Paper: [Students at the Heart of the System](#) sets out a range of measures that the Department is implementing to improve access to higher education.

The Government has established a new framework, which places more responsibility on universities and colleges to widen participation. We will ensure that widening participation for students from all backgrounds remains a key strategic objective for all higher education institutions. We believe it is valid and appropriate for institutions to seek to broaden access while maintaining excellence, so long as individuals are considered on their merits, and institutions' procedures are fair, transparent and evidence-based.

All institutions that intend to charge more than the basic £6,000 annual tuition charge have to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the independent Director of Fair Access what more they will do to attract students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) has agreed more than 160 access agreements for 2014/15 with plans for Universities to spend over £700 million by 2017/18 – up from over £440 million in 2011/12.

The Department has also written to both HEFCE and OFFA asking them to develop a shared strategy for promoting access to Higher Education and maximising the impact of the spending by Government, HEFCE and institutions. We asked them to consider how total investment might be best targeted to deliver impact. It is vital that all the relevant spending is based on the best possible evidence base and harnessed to drive systematic improvements.

## Indicator definition

Free School Meals is a proxy for low income.

The indicator takes the following form:

- (i) The percentage of 15 year olds with FSM progressing to HE by age 19
- (ii) The percentage of 15 year olds without FSM progressing to HE by age 19
- (iii) The overall percentage of 15 year olds progressing to HE by age 19
- (iv) The percentage point gap between (i) and (ii)

The population of school children relates to those 15 years olds educated in English maintained schools only.

Young People eligible for FSM come from families who receive Income Support, Jobseeker's allowance and certain other benefits (see Methodology and Data Source notes). Around 13-14 per cent of maintained secondary school children claim free school meals. This does not include those who are eligible for FSM by income criteria but don't register.

## Methodology

For the most recent data, the denominator used in this measure covers pupils aged 15 in 2006/07 in English maintained schools. This denominator is broken down by free school meal (FSM) status.

The numerator is calculated by identifying pupils who progressed to HE in either 2010/11 at age 18, or in 2011/12 at age 19. HE students are those on programmes of study for which the level of instruction is above that of level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework, such as A-levels.

This measure is calculated using matched data. This matches the National Pupil Database to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) Individualised Learner Record and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record. This allows pupils to be tracked from English schools at age 15 to higher education (HE) by age 19. The measure covers HE courses at both UK Higher Education Institutions and English Further Education Colleges. It must be noted, due to the matching procedures deployed, all figures in this measure should be treated as estimates.

Free school meals may be claimed if parents receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) that does not exceed £16,190
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' - the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

## Caveats

1. There may be pupils who are eligible for FSM but do not claim for a number of reasons. Such pupils will not be classified as in receipt of FSM for the purposes of this measure.
2. Pupils may have claimed FSM in earlier school years, but not when age 15. Such pupils will not be recorded as in receipt of FSM in this measure.
3. This measure only tracks entry to HE by age 19. A number of pupils may enter HE at a later age and are not included in this measure.
4. Prior attainment is not accounted for in this measure. Many pupils will not continue their education; therefore will not hold the qualifications to progress to HE.
5. Due to the matching procedures deployed, all figures in this measure should be treated as estimates.

For more information see Annexes A and D:

[Widening Participation publication](#)

## Further Information

The Official Statistics Release of the data for this indicator is published on the [GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk).

## Who are our partners?

- Department for Education – National Pupil Database,
- Skills Funding Agency – Individualised Learner Record,
- Higher Education Statistics Agency – Student Record.

## Related indicators

The gap between state and independent school students who go on to the 33% most selective higher education institutions  
Graduate outcomes by social background on entry to Higher Education

## Status

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