

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester



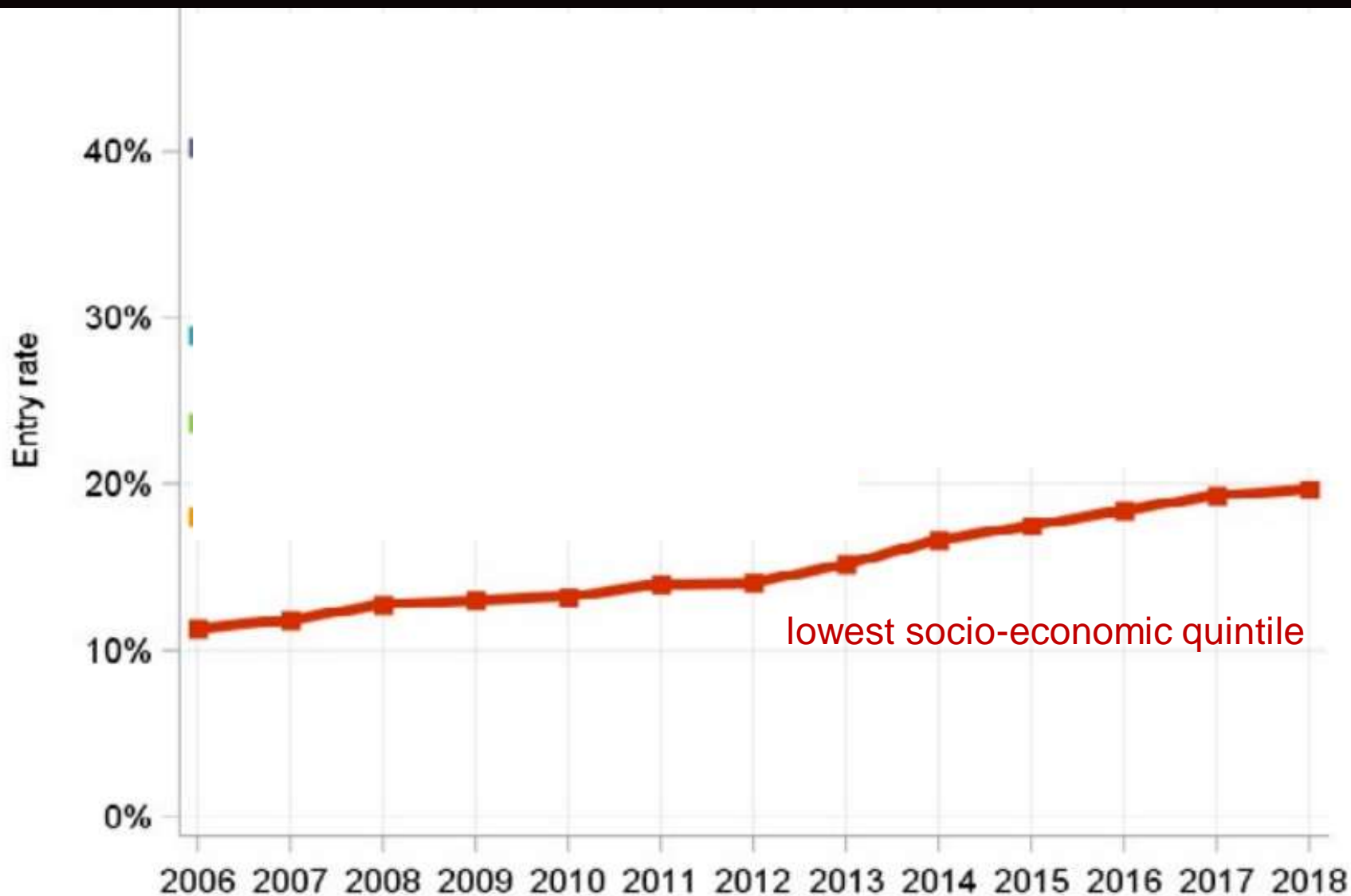
Towards a fit-for-purpose admissions process

Steven Jones, University of Manchester

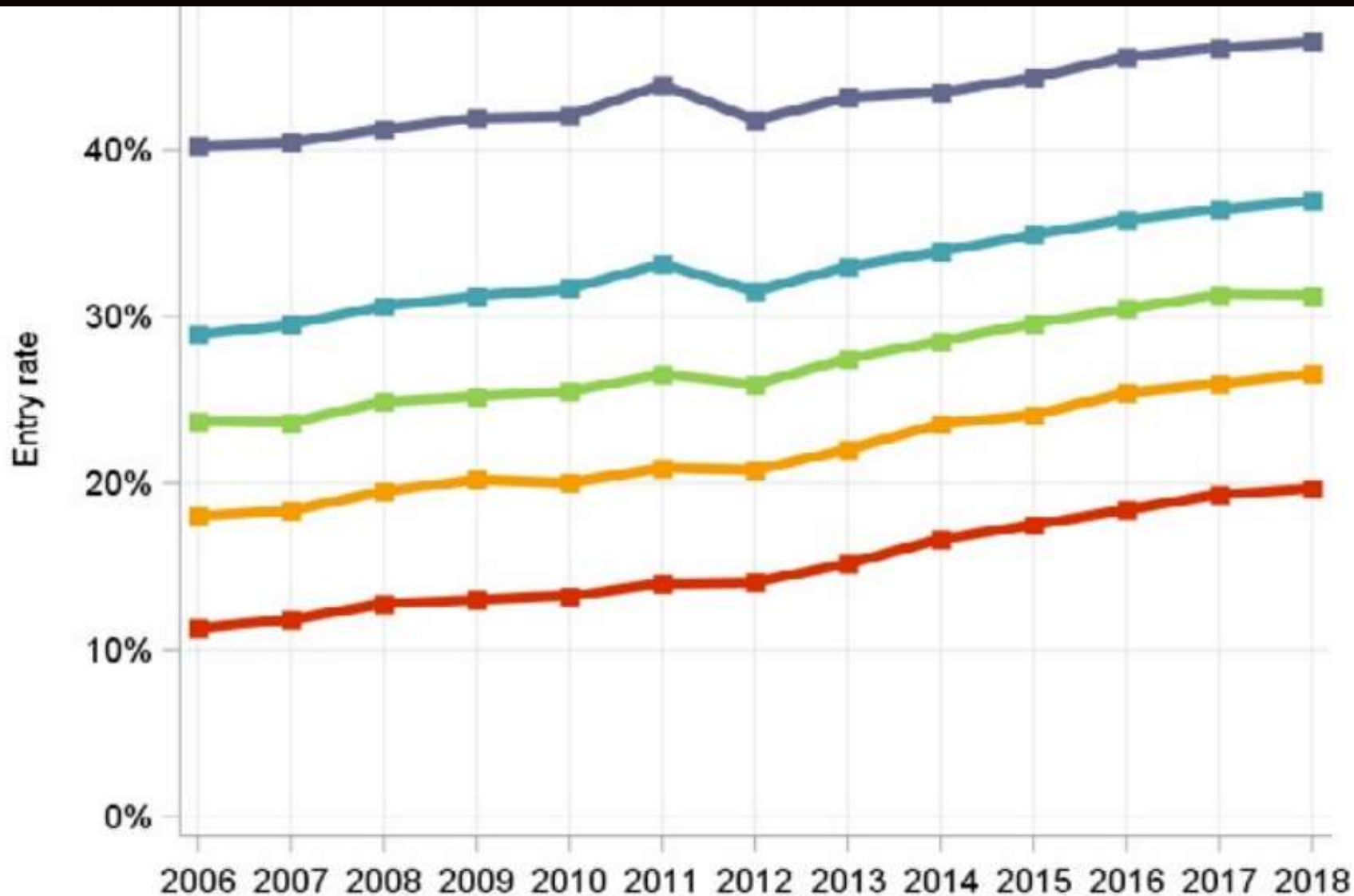
2019 National Teachers and Advisers Conference

08.05.19

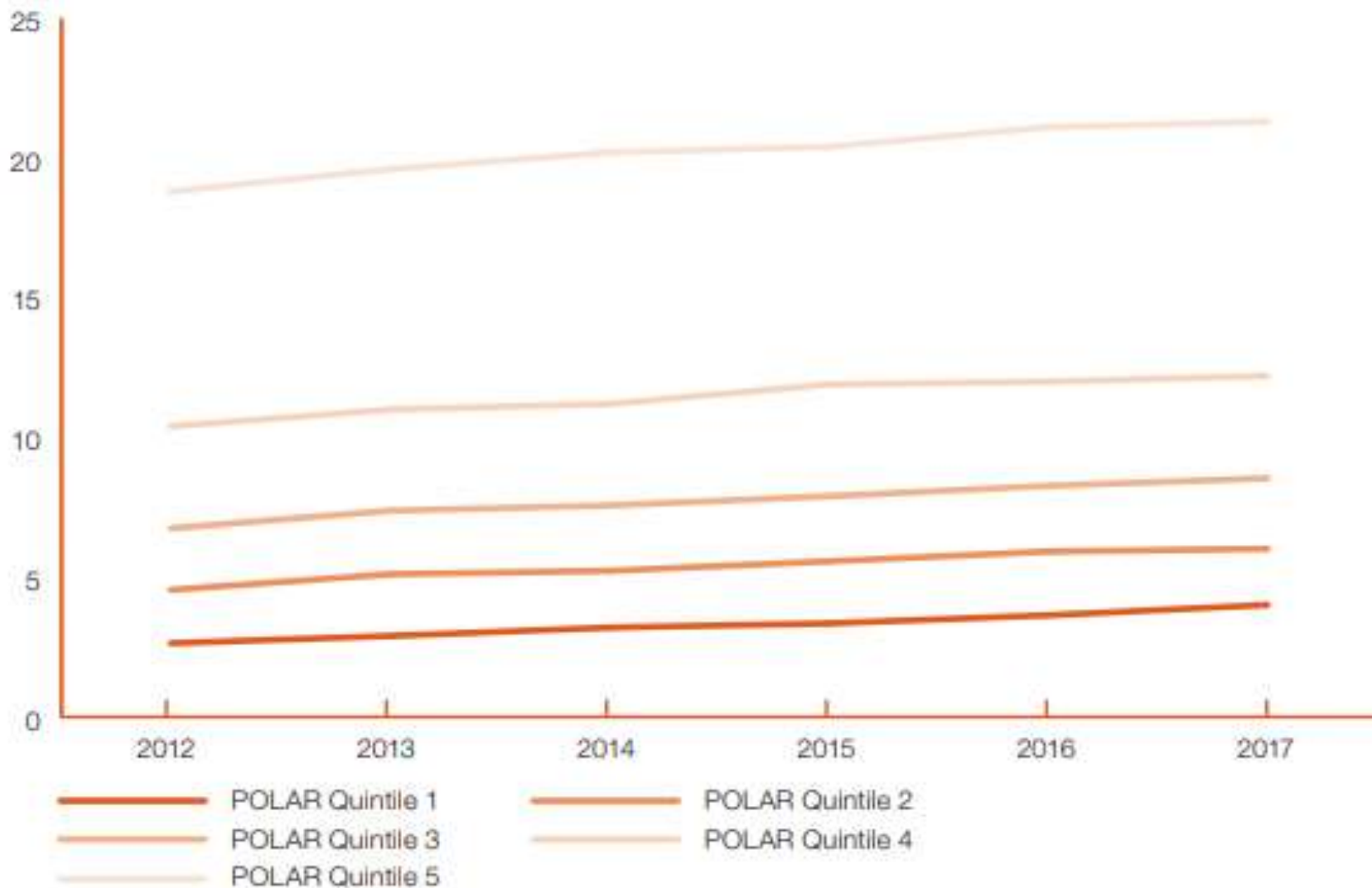
Entry rate for UK 18 year olds (to all universities)



Entry rate for UK 18 year olds (to all universities)

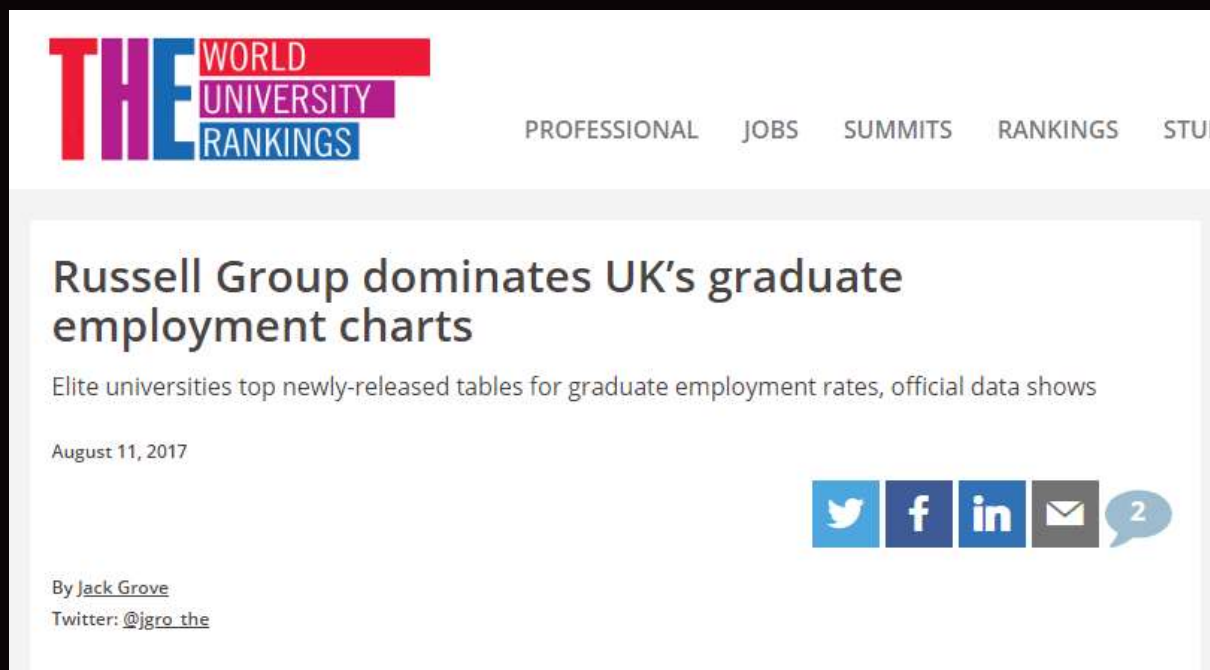


Entry rate for UK 18 year olds (to RG universities)



Source: UCAS, Equality and entry rates data explorers, 2018. <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-analysis-reports/equality-and-entry-rates-data-explorers>

Does it matter?



The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on the 'THE World University Rankings' website. The logo is in the top left, and navigation links for 'PROFESSIONAL', 'JOBS', 'SUMMITS', 'RANKINGS', and 'STUD' are in the top right. The main headline is 'Russell Group dominates UK's graduate employment charts'. Below it is a sub-headline: 'Elite universities top newly-released tables for graduate employment rates, official data shows'. The date 'August 11, 2017' is shown. On the right side, there are social media sharing icons for Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Email, and a comment bubble with the number '2'. At the bottom left of the article preview, it says 'By Jack Grove' and 'Twitter: @jgro_the'.

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

PROFESSIONAL JOBS SUMMITS RANKINGS STUD

Russell Group dominates UK's graduate employment charts

Elite universities top newly-released tables for graduate employment rates, official data shows

August 11, 2017

By Jack Grove
Twitter: @jgro_the

Twitter Facebook LinkedIn Email 2

Average Graduate Premium

£108,000

(lifetime earnings - after fees, costs and foregone earnings)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254101/bis-13-1268-benefits-of-higher-education-participation-the-quadrants.pdf

People with a university or college degree...

- Have better mental health (Feinstein et al., 2008);
- Have higher levels of trust and tolerance (Borgonovi & Miyamoto, 2010);
- Are less likely to commit crime (Sabates, 2007);
- Are more likely to vote (OECD 2013) and more inclined toward civic engagement and volunteering (Brand, 2010);
- Are less likely to smoke (Bynner et al., 2003), be obese (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2010) or be in poor physical shape (Mandemakers & Monden, 2010);
- Likely to consume less alcohol (Kuntsche et al., 2004);
- Likely to live longer (OECD, 2012).

Attainment Gap

Total number of young people from society's **most advantaged** quintile with entry qualifications that place them in the top attainment bracket:

17,560

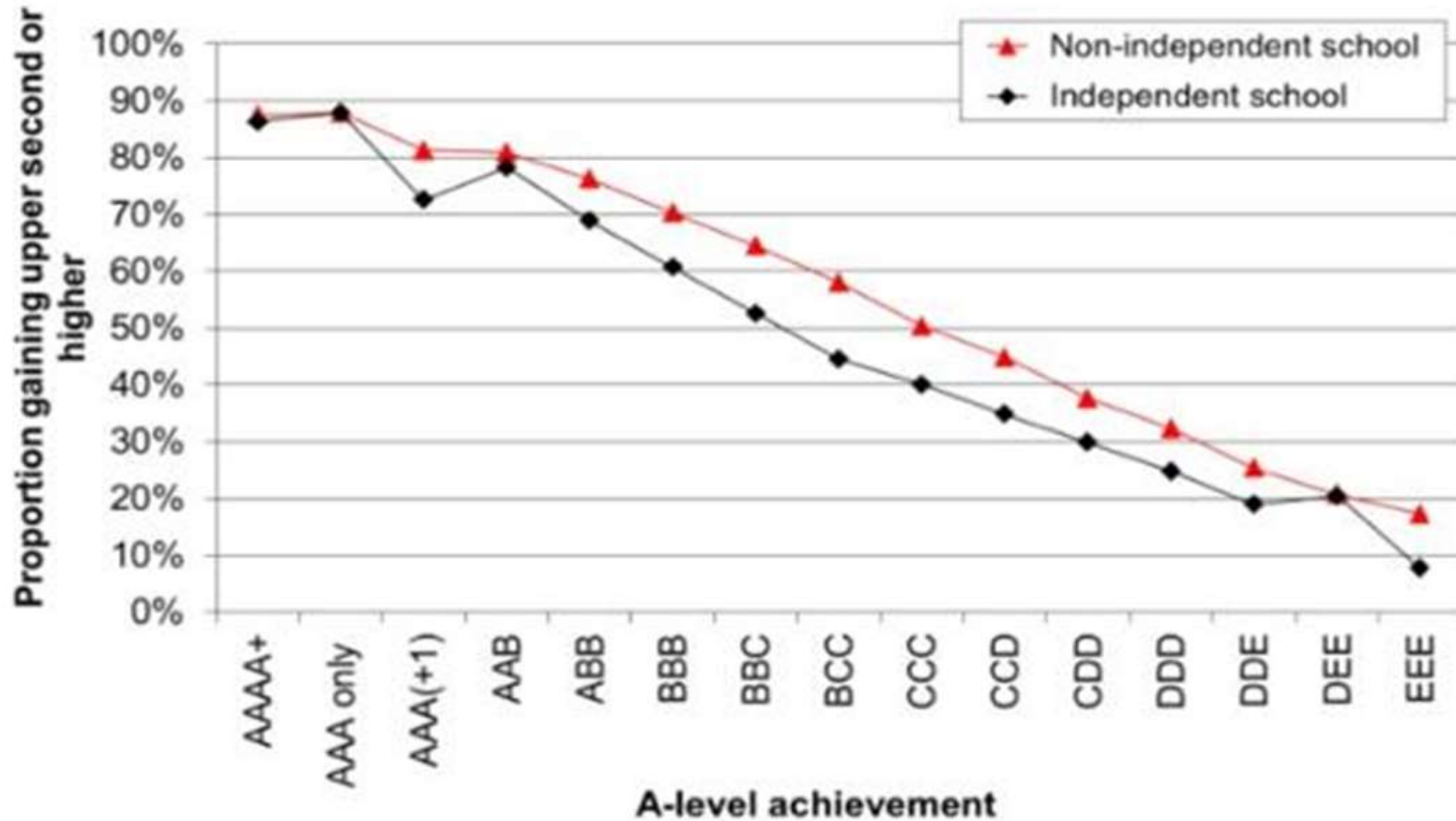
Total number of young people from society's **most disadvantaged** quintile with entry qualifications that place them in the top attainment bracket:

1,880

(HESA, 2015)

<https://hewatch.wordpress.com/category/attainment/>

HE achievement and broad school type



Problems with the UK HE admissions process?

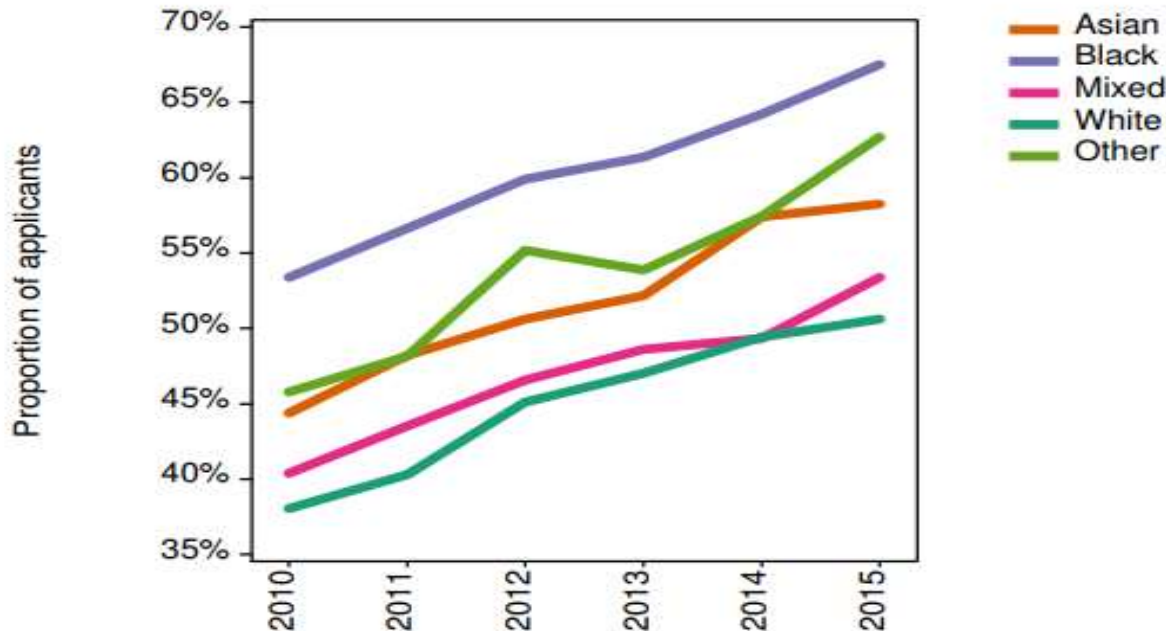
My predicted grades were way off. It's time to get real about A-levels

Grace Holliday

Universities must ditch the crystal ball - as it stands, the admissions process is failing disadvantaged students



Figure 9 Proportion of applicants who missed their predicted attainment by two or more points by ethnic group



years 84% of predictions for three A-levels or equivalent had

Problems with the UK HE admissions process?

BBC Sign in News Sport Weather iPlayer Sounds

NEWS

Home UK World Business Politics Tech Science Health Family & Education

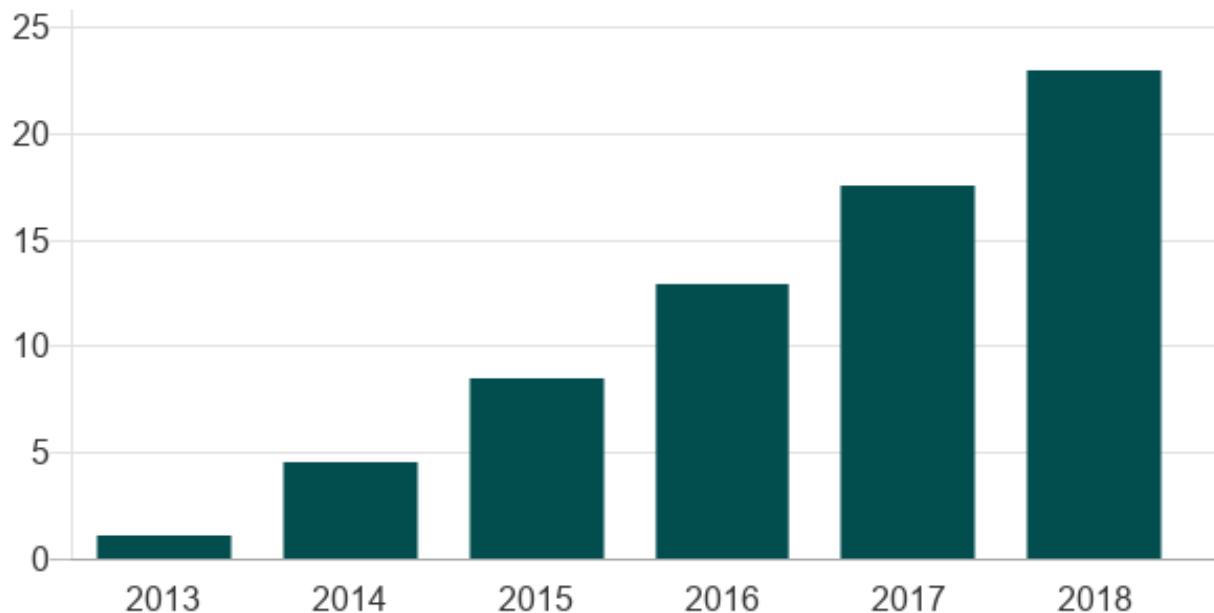
Family & Education Young Reporter Global Education

Unconditional offers used to 'get people through door'

By Hannah Richardson
BBC News education and social affairs reporter

f WhatsApp Twitter Email Share

Percentage of 18-year-olds from England, Northern Ireland and Wales receiving an unconditional offer, by year



Source: Ucas

BBC



Problems with the UK HE admissions process?

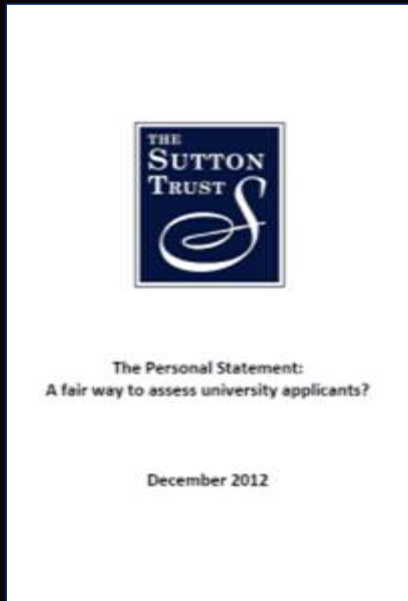


“Applicants to Russell Group universities from state schools are less than two-thirds as likely to receive offers as privately educated applicants (0.59 to 1).”

(Vikki Boliver 2013, p.358)

*Once prior attainment is controlled for, including attainment in ‘facilitating’ subjects

Two reports for the Sutton Trust



“The Personal Statement: a fair way to assess university applicants?”

December 2012



“Making a Statement”

January 2016

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/the-personal-statement/> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/making-a-statement/>

Academic vs Non-academic indicators



“There is good evidence* that for some students, exam grades alone are not the best predictor of potential to succeed at university.”

(Browne Report, 2011:58)

*evidence includes HEFCE (2014); Smith and Naylor (2005); Ogg, Zimdars and Heath (2009); Hoare and Johnston (2011)



“British universities have always looked beyond grades to things such as applicants’ CVs, personal statements and their potential to benefit from a particular course.”

(David Willetts, *Telegraph*, 22/8/10)

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(David Willetts, *Telegraph*, 22/8/10)

The UCAS personal statement

UCAS
at the heart of connecting people to higher education

SUCCESS WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY
www.plymouth.ac.uk

Students Parents Advisers HE staff About us

Students

Where to start?

Step 1: Choosing courses

Step 2: Applying

- > What to apply
- > **Help with applying**
 - > Overview
 - > Registration
 - > Personal details
 - > Additional information
 - > Student finance
 - > Choices
 - > Education
 - > Employment
 - > **Your personal statement**
 - > Key points
 - > What to include
 - > Dos and don'ts
 - > Size and presentation
 - > Similarity detection
 - > Your reference
 - > Pay and send
 - > Data protection
- > FAQs
- > What we do with your...

Students > Step 2: Applying > Help with applying > Your personal statement

Your personal statement

Tell the universities and colleges why they should choose you

The personal statement is your opportunity to tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd.

The personal statement can be different to application essays or personal statements from other countries, so please read the guidance in this section before completing the statement.

Key points to consider

What to include

Dos and don'ts

Size and presentation

Similarity detection

Guides that will help you plan

Statement timeline - for colour printers (PDF) / **Statement timeline** - for mono printers/copiers (PDF)
Look at our timeline to see when you need to start researching and writing your personal statement.

Statement mind map - for colour printers (PDF) / **Statement mind map** - for mono printers (PDF)
Our mind map summarises what you need to know about the personal statement include.

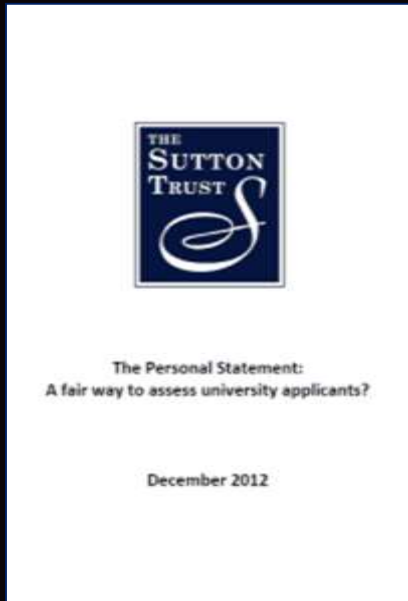
Personal statement worksheet (PDF)
This worksheet is designed to help you think about information you could include for you to write down any thoughts you have as you work through it. If you save the

"The personal statement is your opportunity to tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study.

You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd."

(4,000 character 'free response')

Sutton Trust report number 1



“The Personal Statement: a fair way to assess university applicants?”

December 2012

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/the-personal-statement/>

Data and Methods

All 5,276 personal statements submitted to one department within one UK Russell Group university for one year of entry.

Only the 327 applicants who subsequently achieved A-level grades of **BBB** were included in the study.

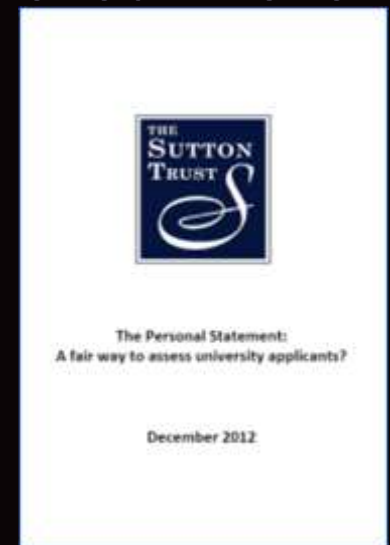
Comprehensive School (87)

Sixth Form College (83)

Grammar School (45)

Independent School (93)

Other (18)



Writing Fluency

“The presentation of the personal statement is of critical importance to demonstrate use of English language and grammar at a standard suitable for entry to higher education.”

(ucas.ac.uk)

Writing Fluency

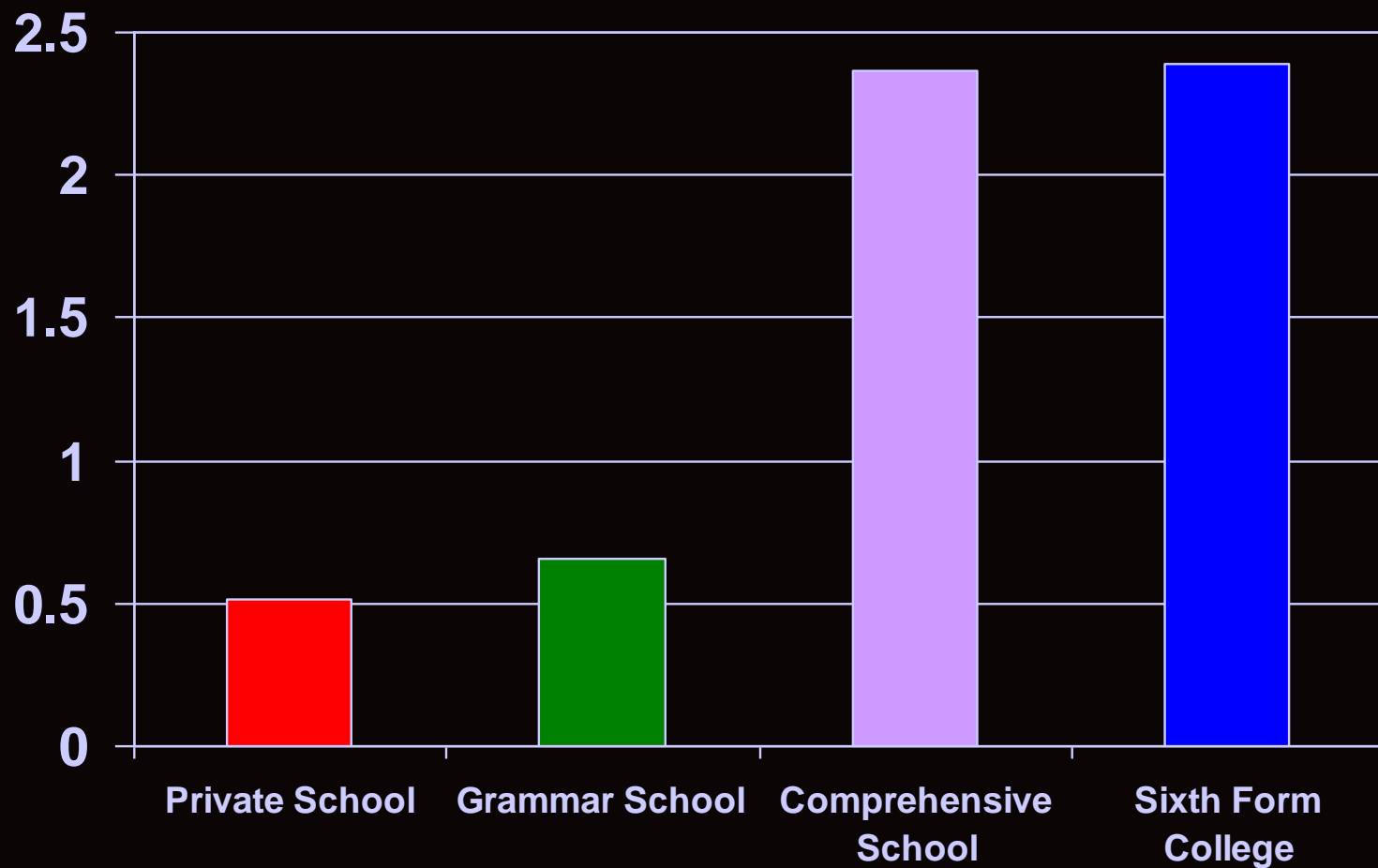
- Defined as the avoidance of clear, meaning-impairing errors.
- Prescriptive 'rules' of grammar (don't split infinitives, etc.) not applied.
- Five categories of quantifiable error:
 - apostrophe misuse;
 - typing and spelling errors;
 - mis-punctuation;
 - ungrammaticality;
 - sentence boundary mistakes.

Apostrophe Misuse

- “I am re-sitting two modular's” (COMP)
- “the countries oldest working Catholic convent” (IND)
- “the economy is in it's worst state for many years” (SFC)

	Comprehensive School	Sixth Form College	Grammar School	Independent School
<i>Total errors</i>	38	38	7	13
<i>Errors per 1,000 words</i>	0.68	0.73	0.24	0.22

Quantifiable linguistic errors per 1,000 words of personal statement text, by school type



Non-quantifiable linguistic ‘errors’

Over-formality

“The aforementioned points all advocate my enthusiasm for this course.”

(SFC)

“The unmistakable link between politics, law and criminology is one which only enthuses my passion to study it further.”

(COMP)

Under-formality

“I am not really sure what makes me so interested in the subject; I don't have an exact reason to be truthful.”

(SFC)

“Hopefully, I'll end up with an A, because I know that I can achieve it and to be honest I am somewhat of a perfectionist.”

(COMP)

Work-Related Activity

“include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s)”

(ucas.ac.uk)

Education and Employers Taskforce Survey

“Did the Work Experience that you undertook help you to secure a place at University?”

- Independent School: 42% yes (13% ‘a lot’);
- Grammar School: 28% yes (11% ‘a lot’);
- Comprehensive School: 25% yes (6% ‘a lot’).

Work-Related Activity (IND)

“As an 18 year old, I have had a variety of short periods of experience in the workings of businesses in today's financial world...

I first became aware of the workings of businesses when, to supplement my savings, I worked for [*company name*], a designer in London, as a model...

I have also worked on the trading floor of a London brokers firm, [*company name*] ...

My other work experience thus far includes work with my local BBC radio station...

events planning with a corporate 5 star country hotel...

and working in the marketing team of a leading City law firm...

I have since had a several jobs, most recently managing a gastro pub.”

Work-Related Activity

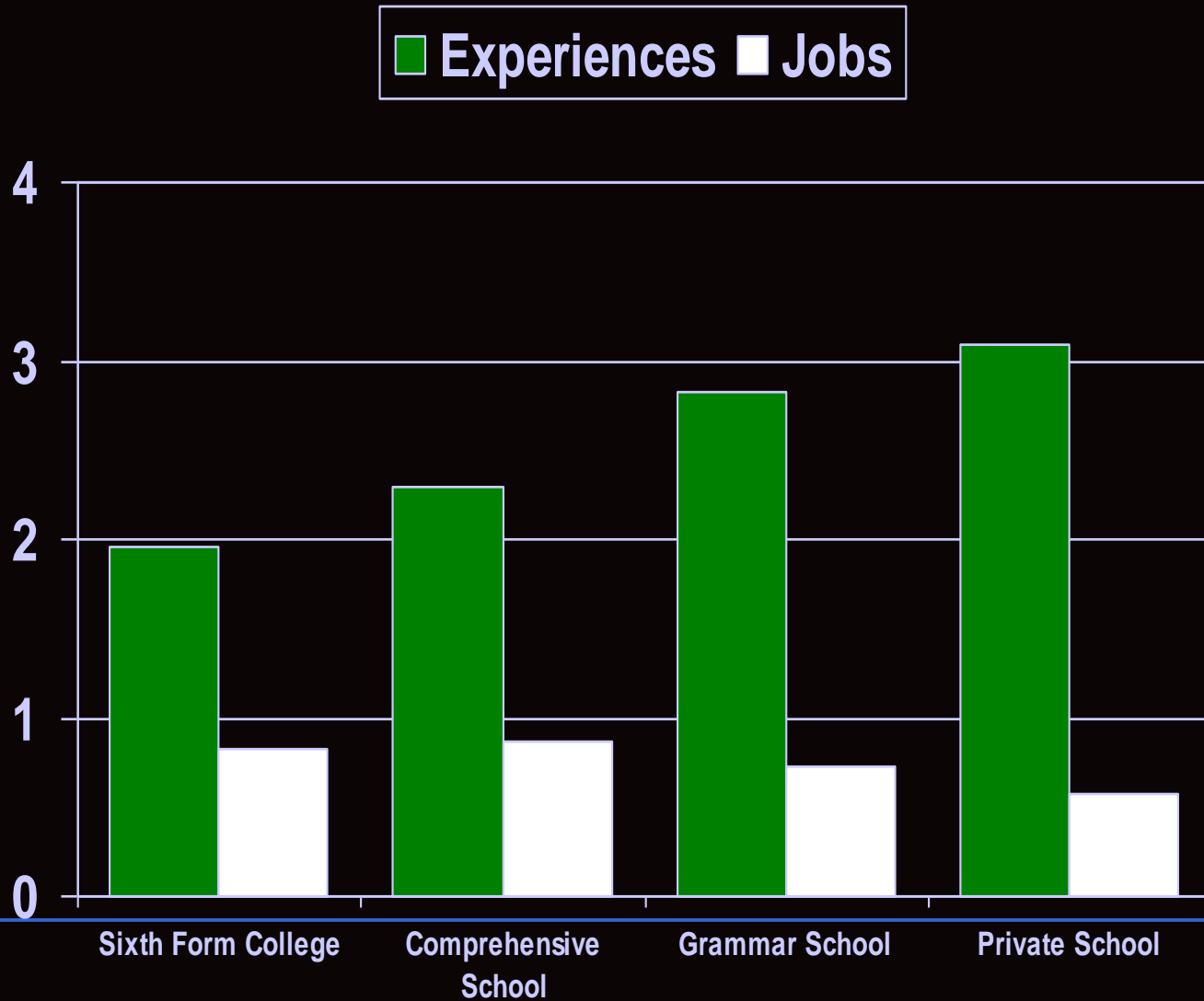
“In Year 11 we were taken on a school trip to Cadbury World ... During the day we were given a presentation by the workers at Cadbury World. I felt this was particularly valuable to my understanding of the business world.”

(COMP)

“In the final GCSE year there was an opportunity for a group of us to manage the school lockers.”

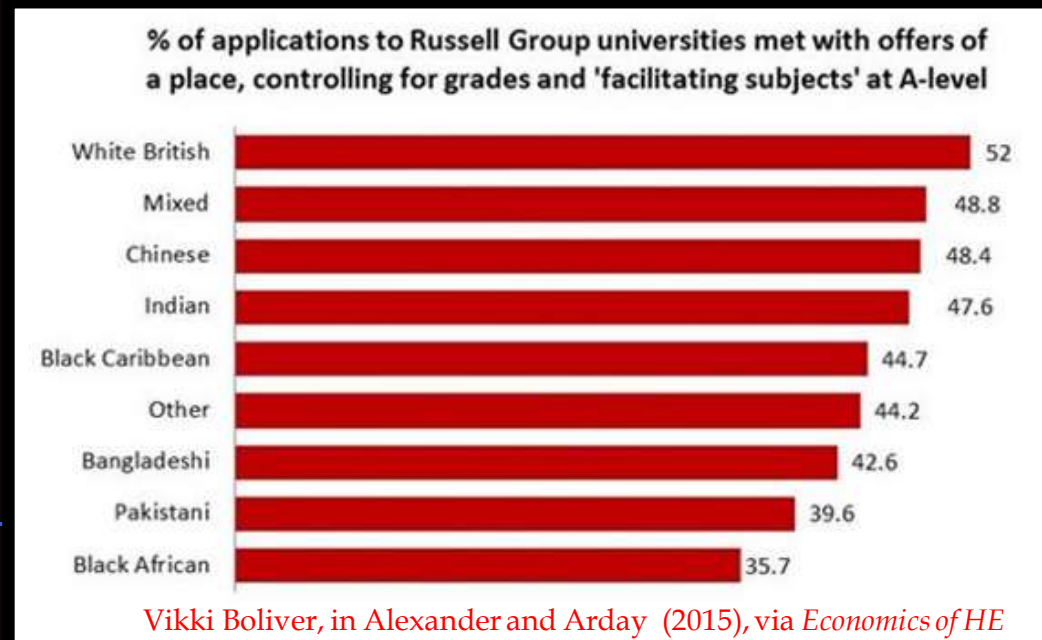
(SFC)

Work Distribution by School Type



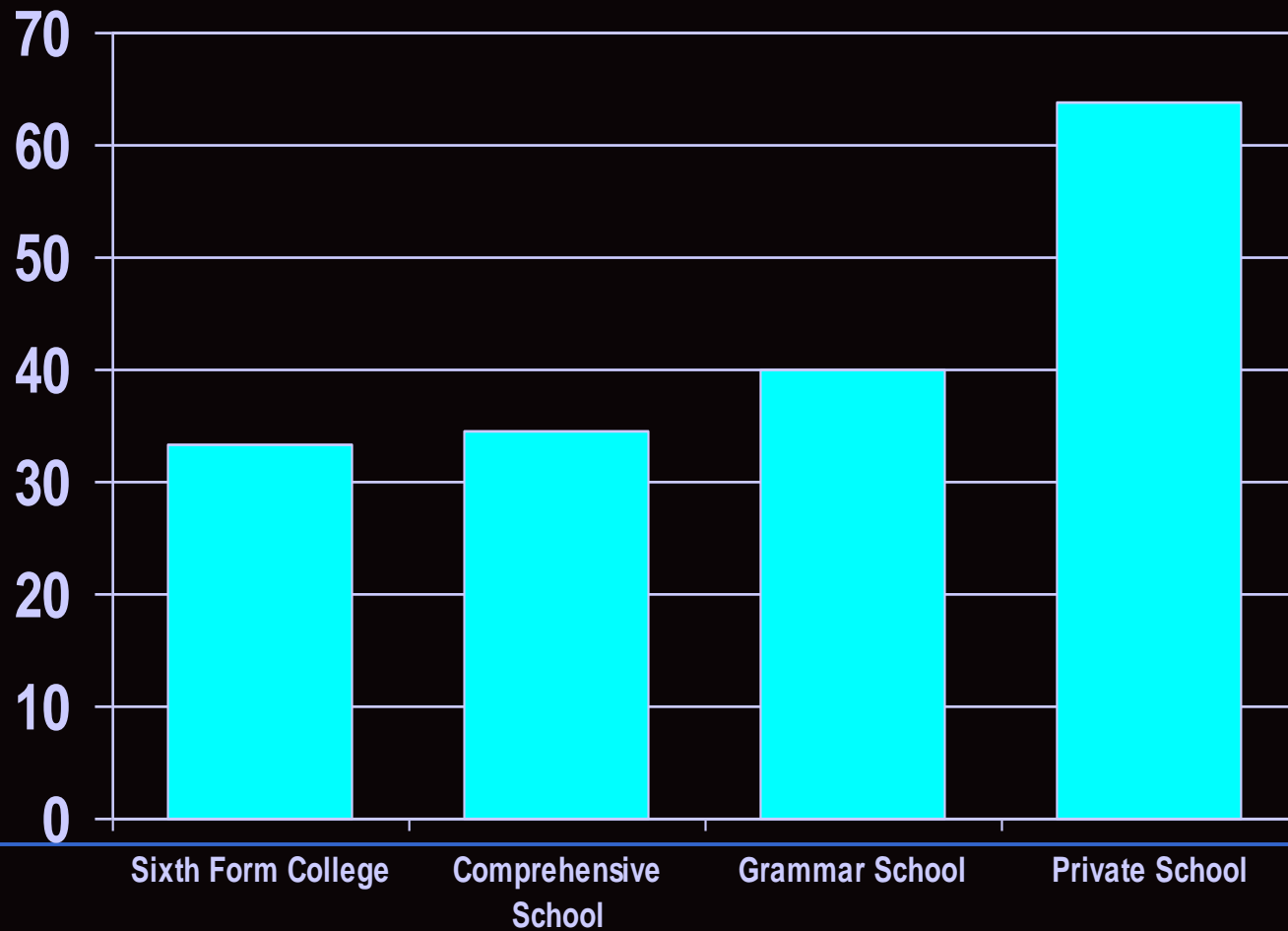
British-Bangladeshi Applicant

“There are various times where I have been a team member such as in hockey, this is where we have to understand our team member’s strengths and weaknesses to evaluate best positions, it makes us understand that one’s ability may be skilful but can always be tackled by two. We had to quickly judge aspects; we also understood how goals and motivation can go through team members, as high motivation can motivate another.”



Applicants' Final Destinations

■ % admitted to a Russell Group University



Sutton Trust report number 2



“Making a Statement”

January 2016

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/making-a-statement/>

Perceptions of statements' quality

State School Teachers

vs

Admissions Tutors



Please assign the personal statement to one of the following bands:

- 1) "This Personal Statement strongly increases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place"
- 2) "This Personal Statement slightly increases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place"
- 3) "This Personal Statement neither increases nor decreases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place"
- 4) "This Personal Statement slightly decreases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place"
- 5) "This Personal Statement strongly decreases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place"

Perceptions of statements' quality

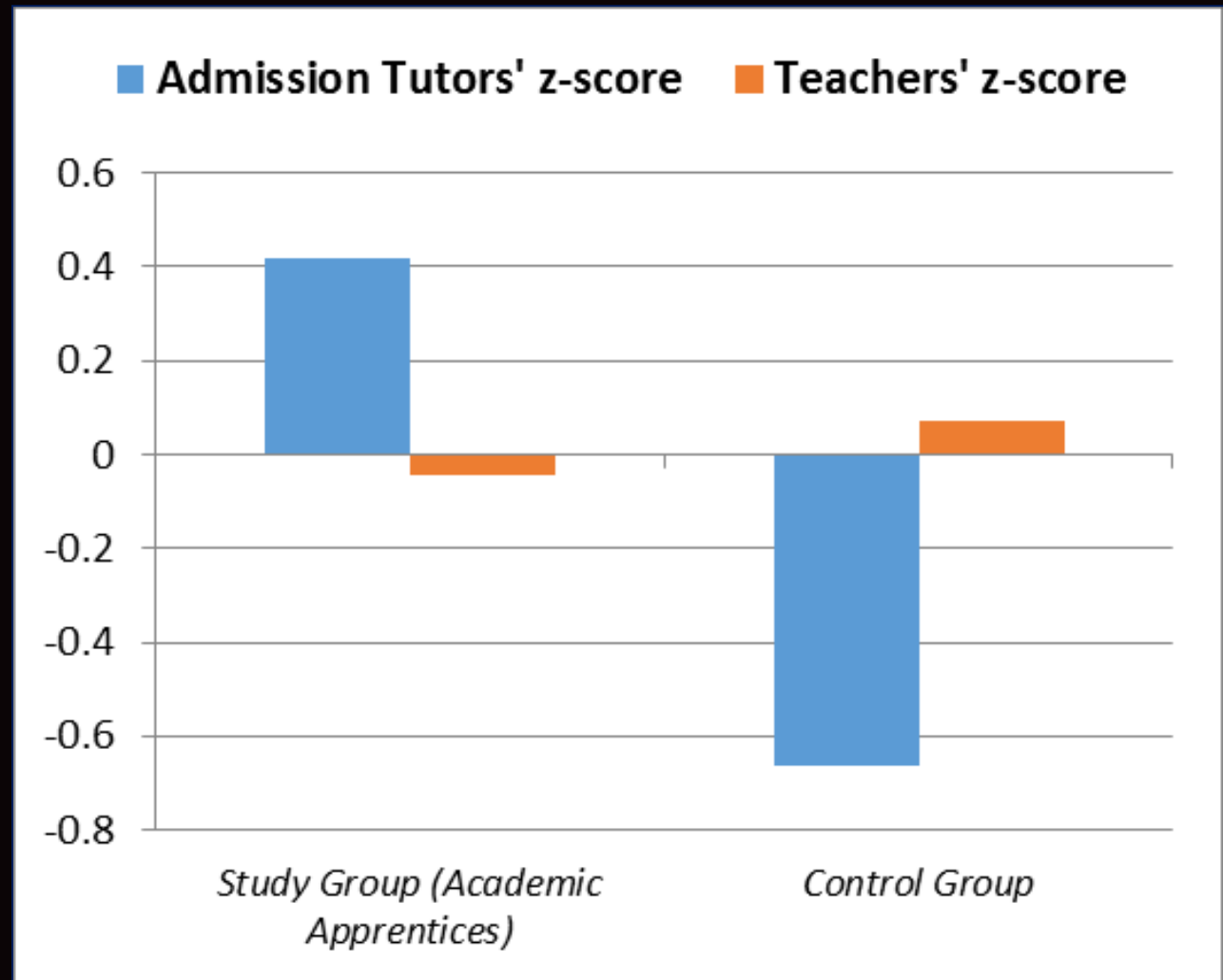
Extract from Personal Statement	Comments from Teacher	Comments from Admissions Tutor
<p>“Captivated by the all-encompassing importance of the law in society, I am amazed at the way crime is moderated, precedents are set and how they construct the nature of the world around us.”</p>	<p>“Shows clear enthusiasm for Law and links this to understanding of its role in society.”</p> <p>This Personal statement <u>slightly increases</u> the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.</p>	<p>“This is an empty opening statement. The weak attempt to define Law wastes space and provides no useful details about the applicant.”</p> <p>This Personal statement <u>slightly decreases</u> the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.</p>

Perceptions of statements' quality



- Only one quarter of the personal statements were awarded the same grade by the teacher and admissions tutor.
- Half of the statements were one grade different.
- One quarter of the statements were two grades different.

Perceptions of statements' quality



What do admissions tutors want?

“We don’t want second-rate historians who happen to play the flute.”

(Mike Nicholson, Director of Undergraduate Admissions for Oxford University, quoted in *The Telegraph*, 27/07/10)

“With the profusion of companies and websites offering to help applicants' personal statements for a fee, no admissions tutor believes it to be the sole work of the applicant any more.”

(Geoff Parks, Director of Admissions for Cambridge University, quoted in *The Guardian*, 19/05/09)

THE **TIMES**
Education
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Welcome to your preview of The Times

Tutors admit they often ignore students' personal statements

Greg Hurst Education Editor
Last updated at 12:01 AM, October 5 2013

Academic admissions tutors took personal statements

Ways forward for universities?



1. Focus on future potential, not past advantage?
2. Contextualise?
3. Maximise transparency and consistency?
4. Learn from other countries?

Sources

Jones, Steven. 2012. "The Personal Statement: a fair way to assess university applicants?" The Sutton Trust. <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/the-personal-statement/>

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Jones, Steven. 2016. "Making a Statement". The Sutton Trust. <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/making-a-statement/>

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<https://hewatch.wordpress.com/>

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