Admissions to
HigherEducationReview

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Consultation on key issues relating to fair admissions to higher education

Closing date:
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Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group
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Foreword by Professor Steven Schwartz

I have been asked by Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, to lead an independent review of the options which English institutions providing higher education should consider in assessing the merit of applicants for their courses. I am supported in this review by a Steering Group representing a range of stakeholders.

Admissions policies are quite clearly the responsibility of universities and colleges providing higher education. But applicants, parents, staff of schools and colleges, and the wider public, all deserve reassurance that admissions systems are fair. This paper attempts to lay out the key issues which must be addressed if we are to guarantee merit and fairness in the admissions process. The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group has not yet taken a view on the questions outlined in this paper, and will not do so until it has considered all the responses to this consultation. We then plan a second phase of consultation, in early 2004, on draft recommendations from the Steering Group.

I very much hope that you will take this opportunity to let us have your views. The closing date for responses to this document is 21 November 2003.

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Executive Summary

1. The paper explains why there is a growing need for reassurance about the principles and practices underpinning admissions to Higher Education (HE). The strong growth in student numbers in recent years, along with the higher level of qualifications held by applicants, has led to higher education institutions (HEIs) looking closely at their admissions practices. So too has widespread concern about the continuing social divide in the make-up of the student body. A minority of HEIs and individual courses receive many more applicants for places than are available. The admissions policies and processes of these institutions have been the particular focus of public debate in recent years. This paper is intended to be relevant not just to these institutions but to the full range of HEIs and courses, from those that can admit most or all applicants with the required qualifications to those that must be highly selective.

2. HEIs have a range of objectives in their approach to admissions, focused around concepts of 'merit', 'fairness' and 'transparency'. These objectives include discriminating between highly qualified applicants, identifying potential not fully demonstrated in traditional examinations, and encouraging applications from students from non-traditional backgrounds. A range of methods is currently being used to achieve these aims, including 'compact' arrangements with partner schools and colleges, interviews, aptitude testing, taking school or college background into account, awarding additional credit for prescribed activities, and specialised pathways for applicants with vocational or no formal qualifications.

3. In working towards agreement on fair admissions principles, it is useful to recognise that views on admissions are influenced by assumptions about the role and nature of higher education. There is likely to be consensus on the desire to maintain academic standards, successful student completion rates and individual institutional missions, and on the need to produce graduates capable of contributing positively to society. Determining what qualities in a student will help fulfil those aims may be less easy, as it involves defining merit and achievement. For example, while an admissions criterion related to completion may be reasonably uncontentious, should HEIs choose those likeliest to achieve the highest grades? Or should they consider what an applicant might contribute to the institution and fellow students and the institutional benefits of diversity?

4. This paper seeks opinion on a number of questions relating directly to the admissions process and to the principles underlying it. For example, should a student's social or economic background be considered at all? Is it legitimate to admit students with grades lower than the norm? Is it desirable or necessary to consider assessment methods other than consideration of examination results? What information should HEIs provide to promote transparency? These and other questions reflect some of the debates about admissions in recent years.

5. Research evidence suggests that some applicants are currently disadvantaged by their socio-economic background, school experience or the type of qualifications they hold. Conversely, some applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds may be benefiting from lower entry requirements. Although they are the best currently available predictors of retention and achievement at undergraduate level, A-level and equivalent examination results may not reflect a particular applicant's potential accurately.

6. Depending on the guiding principles thought appropriate, there is a number of options HEIs can use to assess the merit of applicants and their achievement and their potential for different types of courses. These options are in addition to formal examination results. Options include using school performance data[1] to contextualise individual performance, using GCSE data in a more explicit way, using school/college rank, setting additional tests, using additional objective criteria, interviewing applicants, and taking account of personal background information. The extent to which these measures could play a role in fair admissions will be guided by the underlying principles identified following consultation, but also by practical constraints and by the issues specific to an individual HEI or course.

7. This paper is the first step in developing a consensus on the legitimacy of a range of measures which can be used in assessing applicants and in identifying a set of underlying principles that will promote fair and transparent admissions processes at English HEIs. A consultation questionnaire is enclosed in the back cover of this document.

1The term 'school performance data' is used for ease of reference in this paper to include data about the relative performance of schools/colleges in terms of average A-level or equivalent grades.

Section A
Introduction

A1. Over the past few years, the issues relating to admissions to higher education (HE) have risen to the very top of the educational and political agenda. There has been public debate about the criteria that universities and colleges should apply in deciding which applicants to admit. In general, this debate has focused on broad principles and practices. But sometimes the fate of individual applicants has caught the public eye and their personal ability and aptitude have been discussed in the national media.

A2. Not surprisingly, these developments have caused the Government some concern. While Ministers have welcomed debate about principles and practices, and have themselves contributed, they recognise that the debate has reached a point where some people now question the essential fairness of admissions systems. In April 2003 the Department for Education and Skills said:

"The Government is clear that admissions policies are the responsibility of the universities – not of the Government … However, the Government does have a legitimate interest in ensuring that universities' admissions processes are clear and command the confidence of prospective students, parents and teachers."[2]

A3. The decision to establish an advisory group on admissions under Professor Steven Schwartz, Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University, is part of the process by which the Government is seeking to reinforce confidence. It has asked Professor Schwartz to seek a consensus on the options for assessing the merit of applicants and their achievement and their potential for different types of courses; and to recommend principles for admissions that the Government hopes all institutions will adopt. The full terms of reference for the Group and details of its membership are at Appendix 4.

2 Department for Education and Skills (2003b), p15.

Section B

The context

Why does it matter who gets admitted to university?

B1. HE is a valuable commodity in terms of salary, job security and power to influence society. Many studies show that, despite the introduction of fees and the abolition of grants, the net benefit of an HE qualification in terms of lifetime earnings is large and is holding steady. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) estimate is that graduates earn around £120,000 more over a lifetime than people who have 2 or more A-levels. Attending one of the more prestigious universities, particularly those in the Russell Group,[3] brings particular benefit.

B2. It is therefore unsurprising that the number of people who seek an HE qualification has grown enormously. In 1900, there were just 25,000 full-time students. By 1962, this had risen to 216,000, and there are now over 1.276 million full-time students in HE, of whom 1.108 million are undergraduates, with an additional 465,000 undergraduates studying part-time. Significant advances in prior educational attainment have fuelled this boom in numbers. More young people are achieving two or more A-level passes or equivalent and of those that achieve 2 or more A-level passes, nine out of 10 progress into HE. The average score in A-levels or equivalent is rising too, from 15.3 in 1994 to 18.5 in 2000. The pressure on places has been more intense in some courses and at some higher education institutions (HEIs), but entry standards have risen at almost all HEIs. For a minority of courses, offers of three As at A-level or equivalent are common.[4] Given the projected continuing growth in demand, this pressure seems likely to increase further.

3 The 'Russell Group' universities are Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, Warwick, Imperial College, London, Kings College, London, London School of Economics and Political Science, and University College London.

4 See Appendix 1 for details. Note that the points score system quoted here (in which the highest possible mark for each A-level subject is 10) was replaced as part of the Curriculum 2000 reforms. The new tariff includes points for AS level results and other qualifications.

B3. Students from families with professional and non-manual occupations continue to dominate HE enrolments; students from families with skilled (manual), partly skilled or unskilled occupations are correspondingly under-represented. This trend is stronger at the more selective HEIs. Much progress has been made: the number of students from skilled (manual), partly skilled or unskilled backgrounds has increased by 8 percentage points (from 10% to 18%) in the last 10 years, while the number of students from professional and non-manual backgrounds has increased by 15 percentage points (from 35% to 50%). However, the gap in participation rates is still wide. Its principal cause is the continuing pattern of lower prior attainment by young people from poorer backgrounds. An additional problem is that well-qualified young people from poorer backgrounds are not applying in proportionate numbers to the most selective universities. (See section E and Appendix 1 for details.)

Higher education institutions' responses

B4. In the face of increasing demand for places, rising standards among applicants, and a lingering social class problem, universities and colleges have adopted a range of admissions practices.

Section C

Current admissions practices[5]

C1. In reviewing current practices, it is important to note that, across all subjects and HEIs, there is no objective evidence of bias either for or against students from particular schools and colleges or from particular socio-economic groups.[6] This is not to say there is no problem: there are wider issues relating to fairness that might not be reflected in admissions statistics. And public perceptions are important. The Government has identified the need to reinforce public confidence in the fairness and transparency of admissions arrangements.

C2. It should also be noted that for the majority of English HE courses, little or no selection is required: if students apply with the required grades (or projected grades), then they get a place, and most of them subsequently complete the course successfully. This situation is relatively straightforward. There are other courses which also admit all qualified applicants, rather than select from a population of qualified applicants, but which have high dropout or failure rates. Public discussion of admission and selection practices focuses most frequently on the relatively small proportion of HEIs and courses attracting more qualified applicants than there are places. This paper discusses issues relating to both admitting and selecting courses, since the issues – ensuring the best fit between applicant and course – are similar.[7]

C3. Current admissions and selection practices address a range of issues related to fairness and widening participation:

- the need to differentiate between apparently equally qualified applicants for courses with competitive entry;
- identifying the potential of students whose ability might not be reflected in their grades;
- encouraging students from a background without a tradition of HE to apply to university or college; and
- seeking to create a diverse student body, with the academic benefits this can bring.

5 Throughout this paper, 'admissions' refers to the overall process of home/EU applicants applying and being admitted to HE undergraduate courses, while 'selection' refers to the part of that process that chooses among applicants.

6 See National Audit Office (2002), paragraphs 1.19-1.20. The report also finds no bias among the most selective institutions. See too Department for Education and Skills (2003b), p.2. Studies generally find no evidence of bias against students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds or ethnic minority groups (for example Forsyth and Furlong, 2000 and Leslie and Abbott, 2002), though one paper on medical school admissions does find some bias against some ethnic minority groups at old universities and for some ethnic minority groups at new universities (Shiner and Modood, 2002).

7 Each year about 70,000 applicants (out of a total of around 400,000) are unsuccessful, that is they do not get a place on an HE course. This could be for a range of reasons, including not being admitted to a preferred course and rejecting all less preferred ones.

Factors that influence the form of admissions and selection include:

- competition for places on a course;
- entry requirements for courses;
- professional or specialist subject requirements; and
- geographical patterns of recruitment (local or national).

In many cases, particularly at older universities, selection practices vary from course to course. In recent years, significant efforts have been made to develop university-wide policies, to share good practice across institutions and to learn from international examples.

C4. Common to most courses is reliance on formal qualifications as a basic entry requirement.[8] These qualifications can be the traditional A-level or they can be of a vocational nature. People generally apply for entry to full-time courses between September and January.[9] Applications for most subjects go through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), a national body that forwards applications to the relevant HEIs and records decisions. Owing to the timing of the application process, most young people apply for entry on the basis of projected examination grades rather than actual grades. (Students sitting examinations in the early summer do not know their results until August.) Teachers estimate their students' grades largely on the basis of their performance in GCSE, AS-level and equivalent examinations. More recently, this has been supplemented by information produced through the modularisation of the A-level curriculum in the *Curriculum 2000* reforms. Mature learners without these qualifications (for example those on Access courses) tend to apply later in the applications period so that their tutors can estimate their likely performance on the basis of classroom assessment.

Recent developments in formal qualifications

C5. The *Curriculum 2000* reforms allow applicants to present grades from AS level examinations and information about performance in Key Skills, thus giving admissions staff a broader picture of the applicant's academic performance. Findings reported in a paper on institutional responses to these reforms (*Curriculum 2000 and Higher Education: Villains or Victims?*[10]) are that some admissions staff have been slow to make use of this additional information, focusing more on personal statements, interviews and similar information than on the fourth AS level or achievement in Key Skills.

8 A minority of courses are designed explicitly for those with no formal qualifications; these tend to include a module on assessing prior experiential learning. The Open University is different from other English HEIs in having open admission to most courses. This means that there are no entry requirements and that there is a registration process, not an application process. The Open University does suggest what level of knowledge students will need and provides refresher material to help bring students to that level.

9 These dates may vary for some courses, and students applying for Oxford and Cambridge have a deadline of mid-October and must make an additional application directly to the university.

10 Waring, Hodgson, Savoury, and Spours (2003), p.3.

C6. Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) were introduced to stretch and test the most able A-level students, and also to help HEI admissions staff differentiate between applicants for oversubscribed courses. Take up of the award was stronger than expected, if small (6,841 entries), in summer 2002, and grew by only 6% in 2003 (to 7,230 entries). Two-thirds of entries were from state-maintained schools and colleges. University statements about AEAs tend to be ambivalent. Many admissions staff in universities formed before 1992 ('pre-1992 universities') state that they will not specify AEAs when offering places because only some schools offer these examinations.

C7. The following list describes a range of measures currently being used or piloted in admissions for entry to undergraduate courses in addition to formal qualifications.

a. Interviews

Interviews are used to help assess most applicants to Cambridge, Oxford and University College London. Other universities and colleges use interviews in some subjects or with only some applicants. Interviews are standard in certain professional subjects such as teaching and medicine. Interviews in other subjects are used particularly in the case of mature applicants and those from non-traditional backgrounds or with vocational qualifications. Instead of guaranteeing an offer, some universities and colleges guarantee an interview to some students (those who study in partner schools and colleges, for example). Institutions that use interviews widely generally train interviewers.

b. Portfolios and auditions

Portfolios of creative work and auditions are required for entry to many courses in the performing and creative arts. These may include performances and participation in classes, workshops and other activities over one or more days. For some courses, only short-listed applicants are invited for audition.

c. Compact arrangements

Compact arrangements (where students who study in partner schools and colleges, and who meet set criteria, receive an advantage in the admissions process) are well established across the country and play an important role in raising aspirations and improving knowledge about HE. Regular attendance at compact events and meeting compact requirements (such as homework and attendance) can demonstrate motivation, commitment and diligence. For this reason, participation in compacts can result in preferential treatment for applicants: some compacts guarantee entry while others enable applicants to receive special consideration or earn credit towards their applications, even at highly selective institutions. Compact students may receive enhanced support in transition and during the course. The practicalities of maintaining pre-entry links mean that participating schools and colleges are normally local.

d. Taking school performance and contextual factors into account

A number of HEIs have 'flexible admissions' requirements that take into consideration more than just A-level or equivalent marks. For example, information about the school context and broad guidance as to the effect of school performance on individual performance may be provided to admissions tutors. While a department or faculty usually draws up general admissions requirements, decisions about individual offers usually require the judgment of the admissions tutor. In some cases admissions tutors might make a slightly lower offer, in others they might give a standard offer to one student over another. Some institutions seek to use a more consistent approach by, for example, quantifying the school performance effect so that applicants can be given a numerical score.

e. Earning credit and receiving special consideration

Applicants to some HEIs can earn additional credit towards their application through successful completion of preparatory programmes run either throughout the school year or in school holidays. Special consideration is given at many institutions to students with disadvantaging or limiting circumstances (for example, caring responsibilities, having a long-term medical condition or attending a low-performing school) or who have participated in long-term support programs, Saturday schools and summer schools.

f. Aptitude testing

There is a proliferation of aptitude tests at a number of universities and colleges, or courses within them, and more are being developed. Some of these tests are standardised, while others are not. They include:

- psychological measures of ability, personality and learning style;
- American SATs (a general aptitude test used widely in the US) and BMAT (a biomedical admissions test for entry to medicine and veterinary science);
- subject-specific aptitude tests; and
- psychometric tests (measuring types of intelligence).

g. Entry pathways for students with vocational or Access qualifications

Information on vocational qualifications is available,[11] but many admissions tutors, particularly in pre-1992 universities, are not confident of their knowledge of some qualifications. Real or perceived institutional variations in courses and regular changes to qualifications and their equivalences have added to this lack of confidence for some admissions tutors. While at least some courses at most HEIs accept students with vocational qualifications directly, others, particularly at research-led universities, require participation in preparatory courses. These include foundation years and entry routes through Schools of Lifelong Learning or Continuing Education. Access qualifications appear to be more widely accepted, though some admissions tutors will ask for additional study (usually in the form of an A-level). Access qualifications can vary considerably within the same subject. Access qualifications are not accepted at all for entry to some courses.

h. Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)

The use of APEL for admission of adult applicants is more common at HEIs formed after 1992,[12] but some pre-1992 institutions (for example, the University of Birmingham) have formalised procedures to facilitate its use. APEL requires a judgment to be made about the level of knowledge and skills acquired through life, work experience and study and their appropriateness for entry to a programme. Applicants normally submit a portfolio of evidence and may in addition be required to attend an interview, complete a practical exercise, diagnostic test or written assignment or provide other material. APEL is commonly combined with aptitude and psychometric testing in job selection processes, but the combination is used only infrequently in admissions. Courses with no mechanisms to admit via APEL may require applicants to complete preparatory courses instead (as above).

11 For example, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has a searchable database and tables demonstrating equivalence across qualifications. See Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2003).
12 Schools of Continuing Education, Adult Education, Lifelong Learning and similar at pre-1992 universities also commonly use APEL for admission to undergraduate degree courses.

i. Progression to specialist subjects

Several research-led universities have developed additional progression pathways to highly competitive and demanding subjects such as medicine and law. Admissions arrangements are linked to outreach, preparatory programmes and an enhanced academic programme.

j. Clearing

'Clearing' happens after students receive the results of their A-level or other examinations. It is the process through which unplaced students can seek a place on courses with unfilled places. (Students are unplaced because they did not achieve the results necessary to take up a conditional offer, declined an offer or did not receive any offer.) About 10% of all accepted applicants are admitted through clearing each year. Due to time pressure, the normal selection processes are often contracted during clearing, with the result that a student might be admitted on the basis of confirmed results and a telephone interview.

k. Random selection

Random selection is used as one step in the selection process for the graduate entry medical program at Queen Mary, University of London. To be selected for the long list, applicants must have a good first degree and an unreservedly positive reference from a colleague or teacher, must show evidence of knowing what a career in medicine actually entails and must undertake a psychological profile questionnaire. Random selection produces a short list of 120 applicants, who are then given detailed interviews to select the final 40 students for the programme.

Section D

Merit and fairness in admissions: the context

D1. Defining merit and fairness in admissions involves discussing values. There are a number of participants in the admissions process: the applicants, their families, their schools or colleges, HEIs and, indirectly, society. Each of these may interpret the relevant values differently and may have a different view of what constitutes merit and fairness. The link to wider values also means that HEIs must consider a range of factors in deciding their admissions policies. They need to consider their institutional mission - what sort of HEI they wish to be - and what qualities in a student will help fulfil that mission. The HEI needs to clarify its understanding of merit. These matters are discussed here.

The role and nature of higher education institutions

D2. Universities and colleges receive public funding and thus have an obligation to provide equality of opportunity to participate in the services they provide. Equality of opportunity to participate should also mean equality of opportunity to succeed, and must therefore be interpreted in the context of the standard and nature of university or college provision.[13] This context could include the following:

a. Academic standards: English universities and colleges are continually striving to maintain or improve their academic excellence. Curricula evolve to reflect advances in learning, and new courses are developed to reflect student and employer demand. But should the academic standards required in courses need to change to accommodate changes in admission practices? Or should students be guided to the type and level of course best suited to their abilities and aspirations? Few would disagree that universities and colleges should continue to ensure that their learning and teaching strategies are appropriate to the students they admit and should strive to provide additional support as needed, within resource capacity.

13 Universities have vital roles in contributing to the growth of knowledge and the national research profile, innovation in business and industry, and regional regeneration. However, this discussion focuses on their role in educating undergraduates.

b. Diversity of institutional mission: The nature and level of higher education varies between institutions and between courses (while meeting national quality standards and in some cases professional accreditation standards). For example, a course in Engineering at one university might have higher academic entry requirements and focus more on theoretical principles, while a course with the same name at another university might focus more on the practical application of principles. The 'departure point' of first-year curricula in the same subject varies between institutions, as does the distance travelled, the demands made and the support offered en route. It can be argued that such diversity should continue, on the grounds that graduates with a range of skills, understanding and capacities are needed.

c. Retention rates: English HEIs currently achieve a high level of retention (83% in 2000 for the UK compared to 66% in the US and an OECD average of 70%). It is likely to be uncontentious that any changes to admissions procedures should aim at least to maintain current rates and, in those institutions where retention rates are a cause for concern, lead to an improvement. An obvious criterion for entry to a course would therefore be ability to complete that course successfully. (Judging whether or not a student has that ability is not however always straightforward. This is discussed below in Section E and in Appendix 2.) Further reasons for maintaining high retention rates include the potentially significant personal and financial costs for the student of withdrawal or failure, and the financial penalties for institutions for student non-continuation. It should be noted that there are differing interpretations of retention: does it imply graduation, or can it mean successful completion of part of the course?

d. Graduate qualities: Universities and colleges attempt to produce graduates capable of both dealing with the demands placed on them and contributing to society. Demands and contributions can be in a domestic or professional context, or within a community. By educating students, institutions facilitate the development of social capital and contribute to the economy and the growth of knowledge. They recognise that HE is not confined to instilling curriculum content and that success is not limited to achieving the highest possible grades.[14] Universities and colleges aim to help their students to develop a range of skills, including critical analysis and reasoning, problem solving, judgement and teamwork. Employers particularly value these skills.

14 High grades are an important sign of achievement and they are a prerequisite for admission to postgraduate research, but not all undergraduates wish to progress to careers as academics and nor would it be socially useful for them to do so.

What qualities in a student will help a university or college fulfil its mission?

D3. HE courses generally require specific grades as a minimum entry requirement. These entry requirements do not necessarily encompass everything we might value in a student. Even the achievement of certain grades can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the student's background. How do we view applicants and what do we value in them? For example:

- A student can be seen as an individual, who 'deserves' a place at a university or college as a reward for achievement in examinations.
- Defining merit can involve considering not just what the student has achieved, but also the context in which he or she has achieved it. Is achieving certain grades more meritorious if the student has had to overcome obstacles to achieve them? US public opinion holds that it is, and that "merit is measured not only by where one stands, but by how far one had to go to get there".[15] No explicit public discussion of this concept in England has yet taken place.
- Should merit include a student's capacity to benefit from HE, or the likely 'added value' of that education to the student?[16] Should a borderline student be considered because he or she will benefit greatly from HE and subsequently be able to contribute more to society than if he or she had not participated in HE?
- A university or college may wish to consider what students can contribute to the institution in addition to academic competence. Many universities – particularly older universities with a majority of full-time students and large residential facilities – stress the value of the broader university experience. Such universities might wish to consider students' capacity to enrich campus life with non-academic talents, skills and perspectives. Some of course already do; there is a long tradition of music and sports scholars, although in some cases in the past there has been controversy over the relative weight given to non-academic and academic achievement in awarding such scholarships.
- This leads on to the question of diversity and its effect on the quality of education a university or college can offer. The academic value of a socially and culturally diverse student body is widely acknowledged in US universities and colleges. The US Supreme Court recently found a "compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body."[17] This benefit is less explicitly acknowledged in English institutions, although anecdotal evidence suggests that many admissions tutors do seek to recruit a diverse student body. It can be argued that the presence of a range of experiences and perspectives in the laboratory or in the seminar room enhances all students' skills of critical reasoning, teamwork and communication, in the context of a diverse society.

15 Carnevale and Rose (2003), p.28. This concept is reflected in US admissions policies.
16 The Fourth Report from the House of Commons, Education and Employment Committee (2001) makes a related though broader point (see paragraph 74). This report sees it as desirable "to achieve a more representative social mix in admissions to high status research-intensive universities, many of whose graduates go on to occupy positions of power and influence in business, industry, the professions and in politics".
17 United States Supreme Court (2003b). This comment was in relation to the use of affirmative action at the University of Michigan law school.

Section E:

Merit and fairness in admissions: issues

E1. The previous section considered matters that influence our views of merit and fairness in admissions. Several propositions were discussed. It was suggested that selecting students on their ability to complete the course was likely to be uncontentious. Questions on more detailed points were raised: (1) should selection consider a student's potential to achieve good grades? and (2) should students be selected for their potential to contribute to the university or college and subsequently to society in a range of ways? Addressing these propositions and questions fully raises further issues to consider in determining what fairness means in the context of admissions.

E2. Again the question of perspective is important in that the various participants in the admissions process are likely to have differing views about what constitutes merit and fairness. For example, an applicant is likely to judge fairness by the way the process affects him or her personally: someone with excellent grades who is rejected by a leading university might deem the selection methods unfair. Society, on the other hand, will be concerned with ensuring fair and transparent principles, processes and guidance for admissions to HE.

E3. To inform the process of formulating principles, the relevant issues must be clarified and the relevant facts considered. Debates about admissions in recent years have focused on the following issues:

- considering an applicant's social and economic context (this can include personal or educational circumstances);
- admitting students with grades lower than the norm;
- the significance of the type of qualification an applicant presents; and
- using additional forms of assessment.

Of these issues, the first two are particularly important. The questionnaire at the back of this document seeks views on specific interpretations of these issues. The rest of this section summarises the evidence available in relation to each of them.

Social and economic context: the effect of educational and socio-economic disadvantage on pre-entry achievement

E4. In the UK, students from social classes IIIm, IV and V are far less likely than others to achieve high grades at A-level (see Appendix 1 for more details), and the impact of social background on attainment begins to appear by the age of two.[18] Unpublished DfES analysis shows that lower-income pupils are over-represented in schools that add the least value to pupils' performance. It also shows that lower-income and higher-income pupils alike all make greater progress in schools with a low percentage of pupils on free school meals. Similar patterns are apparent in the US. In the States, individual pupils of low socio-economic status (low SES) achieve less well than wealthier pupils and a high concentration of low SES pupils in a school lowers overall attainment levels.[19] Conversely, a 'critical mass' of middle to high SES pupils raises attainment levels and individual pupils of low SES background perform better in schools with a higher proportion of middle to high SES pupils.[20] A programme to desegregate schools by bussing low SES pupils to predominantly high SES schools has resulted in a rise in overall attainment levels.[21] These findings suggest that some people are disadvantaged in the admissions process in that they apply with lower grades than they might have achieved, had they attended a different school, or had their families been wealthier.

Admitting students with lower grades: the relationship between prior educational context, examination grades and achievement in HE

E5. Evidence in the UK indicates that prior attainment, as measured by A-level grades or equivalent, is the best single indicator of academic success. This is discussed more fully in Appendix 2. There has been much debate and research as to whether certain factors affect the predictive ability of prior attainment. These factors include the type of school or college attended and school performance (the average A-level grades or equivalent of the whole cohort). It has been argued that, other things being equal:

- some students from state schools and colleges will perform better at undergraduate level than students from independent schools and colleges with similar entry qualifications (a school type effect); and
- some students from low-achieving schools and colleges will outperform students from high-achieving schools and colleges with similar entry qualifications (a school performance effect).[22]

18 DfES (2003a), DfES (2003b).
19 United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2003), p.28.
20 Carnevale and Rose (2003), p.34-35.
21 United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2003), p.28.
22 The Higher Education Funding Council for England (2003/32) confirms previous studies in finding a consistent school type effect, except in the most selective institutions, but concludes that the school performance effect is inconsistent. School performance effect can depend on the student's A-level points, gender and subject of study at HE and also by the measure of HE achievement used. School type effect is less consistent at the upper range of A-level points.

The significance of type of qualification

E6. Students apply with a range of qualifications, of which the 'traditional' or academic A-level is just one (see Appendix 1). However, the picture differs by type of institution: in 2002, 89% of UCAS accepted applicants to pre-1992 universities held A-level or advanced vocational awards, compared to 69% in post-1992 universities, and 63% in other institutions. These figures reflect the fact that not all qualifications are recognised for entry onto all courses, particularly at pre-1992 universities, and that within the HE sector there is a diversity of institutional missions and of courses.

E7. Some students may have limited choice post-16, or perceive their choices to be limited. For example, their nearest post-16 school or college might have a stronger vocational than academic curriculum. Other students might simply change their minds and decide at the end of a vocational qualification that they do want to progress to HE after all. Some of these students may be disadvantaged because they have vocational qualifications rather than A-levels. In order to address this issue, some universities with significant numbers of courses requiring academic A-levels have developed bridging programs or foundation years to facilitate progression from vocational qualifications. Others have negotiated with local Further Education (FE) colleges over the provision of such courses.

Using additional assessment techniques

E8. The role of compacts in admissions has been discussed above (see para C7c). The practicalities of travel mean that compact arrangements tend to be local. This means that only some students have the opportunity to participate in them.

E9. A number of selective universities and courses use additional measures such as tests and interviews and consider contextual factors in identifying potential. In some cases, measures are applied to all applicants to the course within each stage of the admissions process, while in others they are applied to only a subset, or to certain categories of applicant. In some cases there are sound reasons for special treatment, for example interviews may help to clarify the content of an unfamiliar qualification, or allow an applicant with a vocational qualification to demonstrate skills. But in some cases special treatment may be limited to a subset of applicants because of time constraints.

Section F:

Merit and fairness in admissions: processes

F1. Much work has already been done to raise the quality of the admissions process and to make it more transparent and professional. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has developed a detailed code of practice for admissions. This represents system-wide expectations relating to the management of the admissions process (QAA 2001). The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has coordinated the development of a general training package for admissions staff. Some universities and colleges have sophisticated monitoring systems. The measures below (derived largely from the QAA code of practice[23]) will not in themselves guarantee that the admissions process is fairer, but they will help an institution and others to judge how fair the process is. Universities and colleges should:

- clearly explain admissions and selection criteria;
- clearly explain policies and processes, indicating what assessment measures are used at each stage and the reasons for using them;
- ensure that all staff involved in admissions are trained in equal opportunities and, where applicable, interview techniques, and understand the principles guiding admissions and their institution's policies (using the UCAS training package where appropriate);
- provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants as requested;
- have a complaints procedure;[24]
- record relevant data and publish an analysis of admissions data annually;
- evaluate the effect of their admissions policies and processes; and
- ensure that their admissions systems are informed by the latest research and good practice.

Some HEIs have already implemented most or all of these measures.

F2. A number of practical issues influence current admissions processes. Universities and colleges seeking to implement the measures above would need to address these issues. These practical issues are set out in the remainder of this section.

23 See Quality Assurance Agency (2001).
24 A complaints procedure is different from an appeals procedure. See Quality Assurance Agency (2001), p.9.

Limitations of examination results

F3. Some courses attract high numbers of students with at least the required grades or projected grades (most applicants to Oxbridge or to medical courses have at least three As at A-level). Such cases reveal a limitation of A-level grades or equivalent as a means of distinguishing sufficiently between applicants for competitive courses.[25] A-level grades or equivalent are not, of course, the only indicator of final degree outcome, which is also influenced by personal qualities such as motivation and diligence and by study skills.

F4. While the previous paragraph refers to 'A-level grades or equivalent', in practice, some other qualifications are less accurate predictors of final degree outcome. The grades awarded in some vocational qualifications measure only part of the course content and, as noted earlier, admissions staff may be unfamiliar with some qualifications.

Considering broader factors: the reliability of information

F5. Admissions staff wishing to assess broader factors such as personal disadvantage or students' potential to contribute to the university or college and subsequently society, often do not have enough information to do so systematically or accurately. Personal statements and teachers' references on UCAS forms should in principle help to provide this, but in practice there are currently limitations on their role. Guidelines on writing statements and references (from UCAS and from universities/colleges or individual courses within them) do include detailed advice, but they do not always make clear that information about socio-economic and educational context or, for example, about home responsibilities, could be relevant. If HEIs wished to use this information consistently, then all applicants would need to be given the chance to provide it. Levels of understanding of what is required vary significantly among the staff who advise students and write references. Levels of support provided to students also vary significantly. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some staff and parents advise to the extent that the personal statement cannot be seen as the applicant's work. At the other extreme, mature students not enrolled in a school or college at the point of application may rely entirely on their own judgment.[26]

25 It has been suggested that giving A-level and equivalent examination results as numerical scores (rather than as broad grades) would help to differentiate between applicants. This presents some technical difficulties under the current method of setting and maintaining A-level standards from one year to the next and would need further investigation.
26 The Paving the Way project reported that non-traditional applicants tended to be disadvantaged by their relative lack of support (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2002, paragraph 7.1.13).

Other factors to consider

a. Time is a major constraint on the admissions process. An admissions tutor with 3000 applications to assess is under time pressure. It is widely agreed (see for example QAA 2001) that a speedy turn-around serves the interests of the applicant. So if admissions staff wanted to take broader factors into consideration, they would have to do so quickly. This suggests that relevant factors must be easily accessible and quickly understood. Money is a related constraint: universities and colleges have finite resources for their admissions processes.

b. HEIs manage the admissions process in different ways. Centralised admissions mean that decisions are made by a central team of non-academic staff. Decentralised admissions mean that decisions are made by an academic member of staff, often a different member of staff for each course. There are many variations in between. Decentralised admissions can make it more difficult to ensure consistent standards across a university or college, and uniformity of training and knowledge among staff.

c. Market forces play a major role in the admissions process in its current form. League tables of average offers are published annually and students perceive the quality of a course to be reflected in the level of the average offer. Receiving a lower than average offer could therefore lead an ambitious student to reject it. However there is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that some students interpret a lower offer as an affirmation of their wider abilities and potential.

d. The timing of the applications process has been debated in the context of fair admissions. It is argued that applying before examination results are known may distort the admissions process. There is anecdotal evidence that applicants without a family or school/college history of HE are less confident of their ability and thus less likely to apply to a course with more demanding entry requirements.[27] It is argued that post qualification applications (PQA), or applying after receiving examination results, would therefore help widen participation. (However it is also argued that PQA could result in more emphasis being put on examination grades and thus on achievement rather than potential, and on narrower rather than broader assessment criteria.) PQA would facilitate a more efficient admissions system by removing the need for conditional offers and the clearing process, and might also save time in schools and colleges, since staff would not need to estimate grades or subsequently check the accuracy of their predictions. There is strong support for the argument that admission on the basis of known rather than predicted examination results must be preferable, though there is also a number of practical issues that need to be considered.

27 Earlier claims that teachers from lower performing schools and colleges may underestimate their students' ability and under-predict are not supported by current data. It is possible that as uptake of A-levels has increased, so too has teachers' expertise in predicting. More recently, Curriculum 2000 has provided teachers with better information to guide predictions. Dhillon (2003) finds that teachers' estimates of A-level grades in the first year of the Curriculum 2000 reforms showed an unprecedented degree of accuracy.

In the past ten years or so, a number of groups and studies have recommended PQA or put forward specific models for consultation, although so far none has been endorsed in consultation. The DfES is reviewing the issues around PQA and is due to publish a report later this autumn.

e. The current English system of admission to specific courses, rather than to a general 'first year' makes it particularly difficult to achieve diversity. It is unrealistic to expect every course (some with intakes of only 30 or so) to reflect the full spectrum of English society. Entry to specific courses, where each course assumes a specific body of knowledge, means that flexibility in entry requirements is limited. US universities and colleges can be more flexible because they admit to a more generic first year, which offers the opportunity for further assessment and instruction before progression to the specialised years of the course.

Section G:

Possible options for admissions practices

G1. Depending on the underlying principles thought appropriate, there is a number of possible options for HEIs to consider in assessing the merit of applicants and their achievement and their potential for different types of courses. A range of possible options is listed below. These options are not new: almost all of them are already used in at least one English university, and those that are not are standard features of admissions processes in other countries. The list reflects energetic efforts that have been made in recent years to improve the admissions process in English HEIs. These efforts involve staff in universities and colleges, but also in the DfES, the Sutton Trust, UCAS and elsewhere.

G2. These options are presented to gauge whether there is a broad consensus as to their legitimacy within fair and transparent admissions processes at English HEIs. It is not envisaged that all HEIs implement all these measures, or that HEIs will adopt one standard admissions process; HEIs will have different views of what is appropriate and necessary. It should, however, be noted that some measures would work better if institutions collaborated. From the applicant's point of view, some consistency is likely to make the admissions process clearer. So while the primary question is: what is legitimate? there is a secondary question: where is consistency of approach possible?

Continued use of A-level grades or equivalent as a strong predictor

G3. As a first point, it may be helpful to affirm the continuing usefulness of standard prior attainment data, that is A-level or equivalent results. These data remain the best single indicator of retention and success at undergraduate level. The continuing use of standard prior attainment data will of course reflect changes in A-level and other equivalent 14-19 qualifications and learning programmes, including those implemented as a result of the outcome of the Tomlinson review.[28]

28 See DfES (2003d).

Supplementing A-level grades or equivalent with other forms of assessment

G4. The following list describes possible additional forms of assessment. Note that UCAS is currently considering the inclusion of supplementary information on the UCAS form.

a. Using school performance data or school type to contextualise individual performance

School performance data or school type could be used in two ways. They may help to:

i. indicate the potential of a student, whose grades do not reflect his or her ability due to disadvantaging factors. Relying on the 'school performance effect' to offer a place to a student could be difficult for those courses that require a sound grasp of a specific body of knowledge as a departure point;

ii. distinguish between two students with the same grades competing for a place: the grades of the student from the low-achieving school could be judged, in some circumstances, to be 'worth more' than those of the student from the high-achieving school.

As noted in Section E, recent research provides better evidence for considering school type than school performance data.[29] However, individual universities and colleges may wish to consider their own institution-specific data. There are additional caveats: school and college context is only one potential influence on an applicant's achievement. A student's responsibilities at home, his or her personal circumstances, varying levels of peer and family support and other factors can also influence achievement. School performance data are currently not available for schools and colleges in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and are available only in a different format for Welsh schools and colleges.

Despite the lack of hard evidence, there is widespread acceptance of the use of school performance data. For example, a report from the National Audit Office observes that it can help HEIs 'recruit students on the basis of ability and potential to succeed regardless of prior opportunities'.[30] There is also widespread support by admissions tutors at universities and colleges (see Appendix 2 and UCAS 2003). It should be noted that the use of school performance data could be justified by other arguments: if merit is defined by the context of achievement as well as the achievement itself (as discussed in section C), then school performance data could help to indicate that context.

29 'Evidence' means here data indicating that students from low-achieving schools (or state schools and colleges) subsequently achieve higher grades in HE study than students with the same grades from high-achieving schools (or independent schools and colleges). See Appendix 2 and Higher Education Funding Council for England (2003/32). See too Universities UK (2003), section 3, for a discussion of factors influencing examination results.
30 National Audit Office (2002), paragraph 3.12.

b. Using GCSE grades more explicitly

GCSE grades are included on the UCAS form and in practice many admissions tutors do indeed refer to them. In some cases, admissions tutors assign a numerical value to GCSE grades and count this as part of an overall score. This produces a more nuanced version of the US grade point average (GPA), which represents the accumulation of grades over four years of secondary school. The UCAS Electronic Data Transfer Study confirms this apparent interest in academic achievement over the longer term. Every institution involved in this study would like to see a complete qualifications profile of applicants from as early an age as possible. This contrasts with admissions tutors' mixed attitudes to Key Skills and a fourth AS level, as noted in the draft report on the *Curriculum 2000*[31] reforms.

c. Using class rank (with GCSE grades)

An applicant's class rank (ie his or her ranking within the school or college cohort) could be assessed using GCSE grades. Class rank is normally considered in US university and college admissions, but is not used in England. Its use is justified by the same principle that underlies the use of school performance data, namely that an individual's achievement is affected by his or her educational context. (See Appendix 2 for details.) Using class rank means that if two students had the same grades, the grades of the student who ranked first in his or her school would be 'worth more' than those of the student who ranked last in his or her cohort.

The 'top X % system' is an extension of using class rank. It guarantees a place for the top X% of a school or college at a university, and thus has the advantage of clarity. However, as Appendix 2 points out, it is likely to be difficult to implement in the English system. Furthermore, top X% systems are relatively new and have not yet produced conclusive evidence of success.[32]

31 Waring, Hodgson, Savoury, and Spours (2003).
32 A recent study at Harvard University examined the effect of top X% systems in three states on racial and ethnic diversity. The study concluded that "it is incorrect to attribute any significant increase in campus diversity to a percent plan alone" (Horn and Flores, 2003). Top X% systems do appear to result in greater geographic diversity, that is, students are drawn from a greater number of schools, but evidence of effect on socio-economic diversity is mixed. Top X% students appear to do at least as well academically as non-top X% students (see Appendix 2).

d. Role of additional testing

There has been much interest in recent years in the use of additional testing. Like school performance data, additional testing can be used to indicate the potential of a student whose examination grades do not reflect his or her ability due to disadvantaging factors, or to distinguish between two students with the same grades. As noted in Section C, a number of HEIs use various forms of additional testing.

The Sutton Trust continues energetically to investigate the potential of SATs, the general aptitude test used widely in the US, where most universities and HE colleges count applicants' SAT scores alongside their GPA. The Sutton Trust is currently sponsoring a pilot project at the University of Dundee and has commissioned trials. Initial results suggest that American SATs could help to indicate potential in a different way from A-levels or equivalent. Some students who have not scored highly in school exams do score highly in American SATs.[33]

US research suggests that SATs can indeed help to predict degree outcome, and there is some evidence that the additional benefit of SATs over GPA is statistically significant, if limited.[34] Some UK HEIs (or individual courses) use more subject-specific aptitude tests, believing these to be a more accurate predictor of undergraduate performance. Since many of these tests have been introduced relatively recently, there is not yet a broad body of published evaluative evidence.

Public debate about American SATs has raised questions about their 'coachability'.[35] A research review and analysis sponsored by the Sutton Trust and conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research on the effect of coaching suggests that coaching can increase scores by 30 points. This constitutes a 3% change on the average base score of 1,000. The majority of any increase occurs in the first 10 hours of familiarisation. Questions about the coachability of SATs should of course be seen in the context of the evident coachability of any standardised examination, including A-levels. Public debate has also raised concerns about the proliferation of tests, and how American SATs would fit with the 14 – 19 curriculum review.[36]

33 See McDonald, Newton and Whetton (2001), p.2.
34 Carnevale and Rose (2003), pp.40-41, give data indicating that graduation rates at selective US universities and HE colleges fall incrementally with SAT scores below 1000, are stable with SAT scores between 1000 and 1200, and rise slightly with scores above that. Bowen and Bok (1998) make a more complex analysis, controlling for GPA, subject studied and other factors, and testing the correlation with class rank at graduation. They find that 'an additional 100 points of combined SAT score is associated, on average, with an improvement of only 5.9 percentile points in class rank.' Bowen and Bok (1998), p.74.
35 See for example a report on American SATs in the Fourth Report from the House of Commons, Education and Employment Committee (2001), Appendix 6.
36 See the consultation paper and progress report of the 14 – 19 review (also known as the Tomlinson review), Department for Education and Skills (2003c) and (2003d).

e. Using additional objective criteria linked to success on HE courses

The Universities UK *Fair Enough?* project identified a number of objective criteria linked to success on courses. It sought to establish whether these criteria could specifically help to identify potential in applicants with relative educational disadvantage. While some criteria are discipline-specific, four are common across all courses:

- self-organised;
- works well independently;
- motivated to learn; and
- interested in subject area.

A major finding of the project was that applicants for selective courses all tended to meet the identified criteria, which were therefore not useful in discriminating between them. The criteria were more useful in assessing applicants for recruiting (admitting) courses.[37] The project also found that the process of applying the criteria was time-consuming. The use of a set of such criteria could be explored further, with the aim of developing a process that was faster to use and enabled more differentiation at the upper end of achievement. Speed could be achieved by the assessment being done at the applicant's school or college and presented in quantifiable form. A new project drawing on Personal Development Records in making e-applications, especially in writing a structured personal statement, may be able to contribute.[38]

f. Role of interviews

The role of interviews in helping to assess students with vocational or no formal qualifications has already been noted and the suggestion made that where interviews are used, interviewers should receive appropriate training. In addition, universities and colleges may wish to consider using a fully structured interview (these are already used in some courses and some HEIs). Studies of admissions interviews for more general purposes have failed to provide much evidence for their validity either as predictors of university grades or even as predictors of the personal characteristics of graduates. A study conducted at Cornell University found that academic staff were unable to distinguish between students admitted with an interview and a subsequent class of students, which had not been interviewed at admission.[39] If interviews are used, there is some evidence that structured interviews may be more valid predictors.

37 Universities UK (2003), p.8.
38 Led by Dr Angela Smallwood of the University of Nottingham, the project involves sixth form colleges, Excellence Challenge and several other universities.
39 Kelman and Canger (1994), p.21.

g. Explicitly considering personal background

The limitations of the current UCAS form in eliciting relevant information about personal background have already been discussed. It should also be noted that a number of HEIs use an additional application form requesting specific information about the student's personal background. The UCAS Electronic Data Transfer Study has investigated the feasibility and desirability of including contextual information on the UCAS form. The study shows that while institutions would like to see school performance data included on the form, they were less enthusiastic about including family income and parental education.

It is interesting to note that the University of California, along with many other US universities and colleges, does ask for this information on the application form. The University of California subsequently uses this information to inform admissions decisions and explicitly states that it does so (see Appendix 3). The whole university trialled the use of set scores for various factors; but only the Davis campus has retained this system. While the vast majority of points are given for GPA and SATs, students do earn, for example, 250 points for attending a low-performing school or for having no family history of HE (within a possible total of 14,000).

h. Compacts

Compacts have a vital role in raising aspirations and building confidence. But they are not without problems: students might potentially be involved in compact arrangements with more than one university and face a confusing array of requirements. Alternatively, a student may attend a school or college that has no compact arrangements. Reassessing compacts with a view to greater collaboration between institutions may help address these issues. This collaboration could take the form of a regional system – incorporating elements of the top X% principle – and/or a national system that provided a standard range of options within groupings of HEIs. In such a system the school links or outreach component would continue to be delivered locally.

i. Encouraging centralised admissions or partly centralised admissions

Centralised admissions are not a method of assessing merit, but are discussed here because the choice of method is likely to depend partly on who is using it and how much time that person has. There is also a broader potential effect on the form of implementation: if central staff were to administer more or all of the admissions process (for example the assessment of disadvantaging factors), then this might help to:

- ensure a more consistent and professional service;
- ease time constraints (in principle, readers could be appointed on a temporary basis as they are in US universities and colleges); and
- make efficient use of resources.

Section H:
Concluding comments

H1. As noted earlier in this paper, defining merit and fairness in HE admissions involves questions of value - questions which those participating in the admissions process will interpret differently. Identifying a common position may require some movement by all partners. The range of issues inherent in admissions and the constraints of reality may force further compromise.

H2. Admissions will continue to involve individual judgment as long as people rather than mechanisms make decisions, and as long as those applying are treated as individuals rather than as sets of figures. Some of the options described are based on statistical averages, but admissions staff cannot know for certain whether each applicant will subsequently reflect those averages. There will continue to be extenuating circumstances that could result in a university or college being seen as inconsistent. The role of Professor Schwartz's steering group in the context of these continuing uncertainties and individual judgments is to support admissions staff and their institutions by developing a framework of agreed principles and presenting them with a range of legitimate options for assessing applicants' merit, achievement and potential.

H3. The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group will undertake a two-phase consultation on the matters within its remit. It intends to consult widely on the key issues relating to admissions, from 23 September until 21 November, on the basis of this document, both formally, through written responses, and in meetings, seminars and informal discussion with people who have an interest in admissions to HE in England.

Following consideration of responses to the first phase of consultation, the steering group will prepare a draft set of recommendations covering principles for fair admissions systems and options to be considered in assessing applicants. It intends to consult again on these draft recommendations, in early 2004.

H4. If you wish to comment on the issues raised in this consultation, please refer to the questionnaire in the back cover of this document.

Responding to the Consultation

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by **21 November 2003**.

Admissions to HE Consultation Unit
Level 1, Area B, Castle View House
East Lane
Runcorn WA7 2GJ

Fax: **01928 794311**

Responses may also be made on-line at: **www.admissions-review.org.uk**

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Appendix 1
Growth in Higher Education

1. Introduction

This appendix provides more details on the growth of higher education (HE), trends in prior attainment, and how the picture has changed over time, in terms of modes of study, age profile of students, patterns of study at different types of university, and social class.

It also looks in more detail at the factors underlying the current pattern of participation in HE by social class.

2. Growth in higher education

1900 to 1962

This period saw enormous expansion in the numbers of students in full-time higher education in the UK. An eightfold increase took place, from 25,000 in 1900 to 216,000 in 1962. However, even by 1962, going to university was for a small minority. The age participation index (number of young people in full time, undergraduate HE expressed as a percentage of the age group) is estimated at around 1% in 1900 and still only 6% in 1962.

1963 to present

Full time HE student numbers in Great Britain rose substantially between 1963 and 1995, from 216,000 in 1962 to over 1.138 million in 1995. The age participation index (API) rose from 6% in 1962 to 32% in 1995. Further growth has taken place since 1995, although at a slower rate, and by 2001 there were 1.276 million full time HE students. The API in 2001 was 33% and there were 1.108 million full time undergraduate students in Great Britain. Part time HE student numbers in Great Britain also increased, from 124,000 in 1962 to 661,000 in 2001.

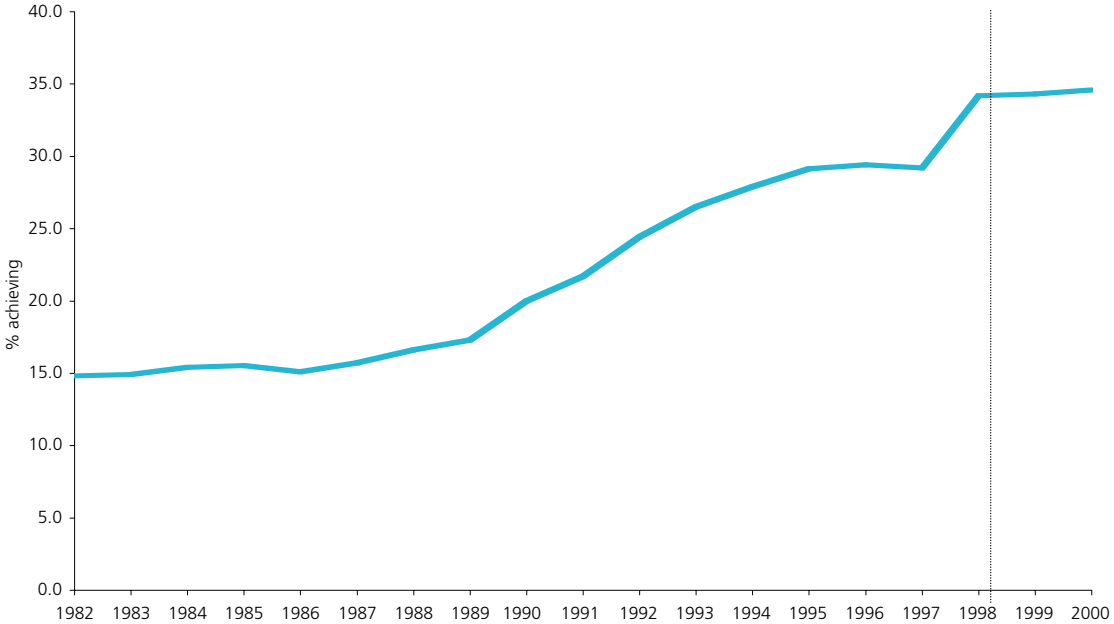
3. Trends in prior educational attainment

Educational attainment prior to HE has been steadily improving over the past twenty years. The proportion of young people achieving two or more A-levels or equivalent has grown from 14.9% in 1982/83 to 34.6% in 1999/2000. The average point score of candidates has also been rising, from 15.3 in 1993/94 to 18.5 in 1999/2000. (See graphs 1 and 2.) This has placed particular pressure on applications to 'old' (pre-1992) universities. In 1994, 11,608 applicants to pre-1992 universities achieved 30 A-level points; by 2001, the figure was 21,525. The comparable figures for post-1992 universities are 2,110 and 2,868.

Furthermore, the proportion of A-level candidates who achieve three or more A-levels is rising, as is the proportion gaining three or more grade As. (See graph 3.)

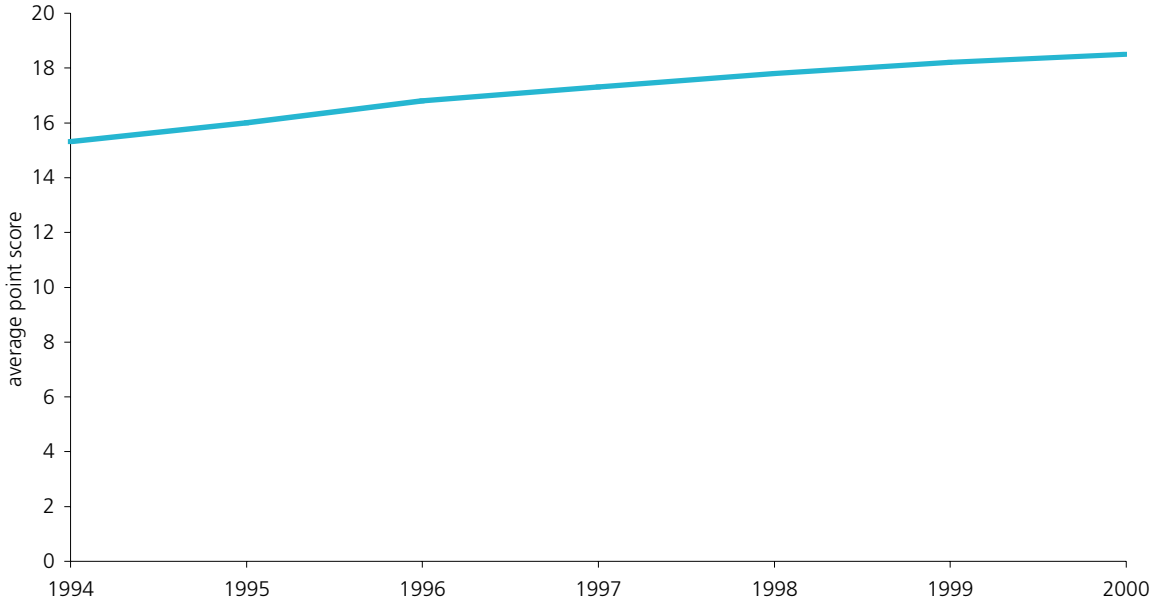
Nine out of ten of those achieving two A-levels enter higher education by age 21. Just over 60% of those who achieve 2 A-levels enter higher education at 18.

Graph 1: Percentage of 17 year olds[1] achieving 2 or more A/AS/AGNVQ[2], 1982-2000[3,4]



1 Population aged 17 at 31 August.
2 Figures for 1998, 1999 and 2000 include results for Advanced GNVQs.
3 Figures for 1981/82 to 1990/91 are based on the accumulative results of all School Leavers, and home full-time students in Further Education aged 18 or under. Figures from 1991/92 are derived from the number of candidates aged 18 or under who achieved the stated result for the first time, in the relevant year, in all Schools and Further Education Colleges

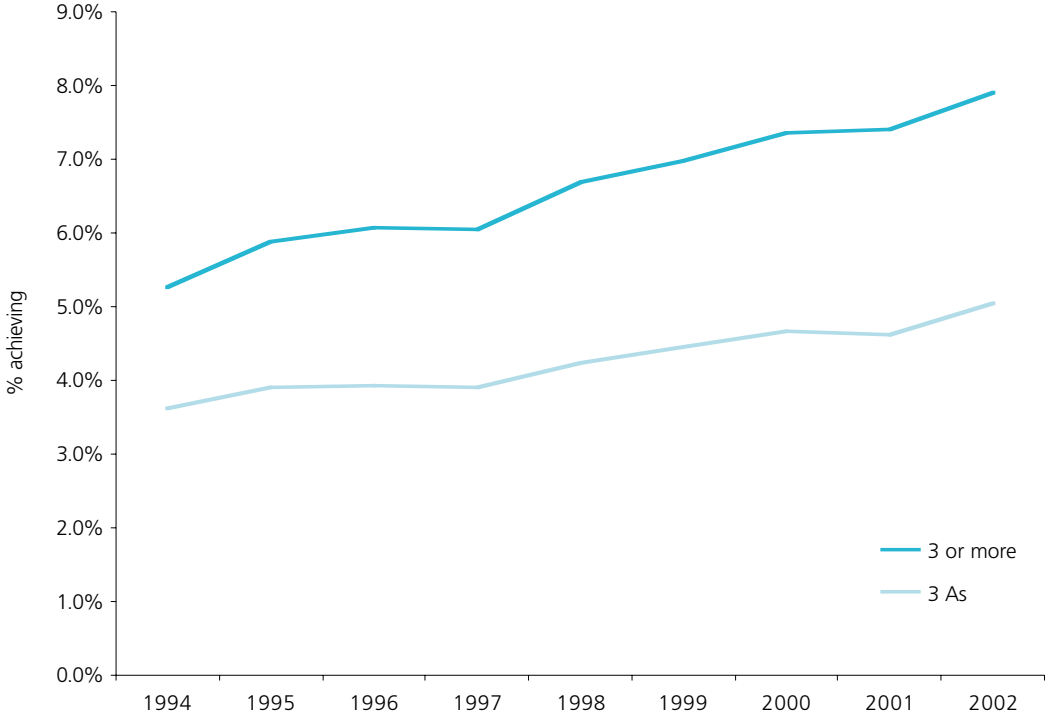
Graph 2: Average point score of 16-18 year old[1] candidates entered for 2 or more A/AS examinations, 1994-2000[2]



[1] Age at start of the academic year, i.e., at 31 August

[2] Figures for 2001 onwards are unavailable on the same basis because of the Qualifying for Success reforms introduced in September 2000. As part of these reforms, Vocational Certificate of Education qualifications were introduced and the Advanced Supplementary examinations were replaced by Advanced Subsidiary examinations.

Graph 3: Percentage of 16-18 year old candidates achieving a) 3 grade As at A level and b) 3 or more grade As at A level, 1994-2002



4. How the picture is changing

The composition of the HE sector, and of student applicants, has become more diverse over time in a number of ways.

Prior attainment

In 2000/01 just under half of all level 3 awards in England were vocational (Advanced GNVQs/VCEs, NVQs, and other vocational qualifications). In the 19-21 age group, over 80% of all level 3 qualifications (ie including A-levels) were vocational. Only around half of those who achieve vocational level 3 qualifications (the equivalent of A-levels) by age 18 go on to higher education by age 21, compared to 90% with A-levels.

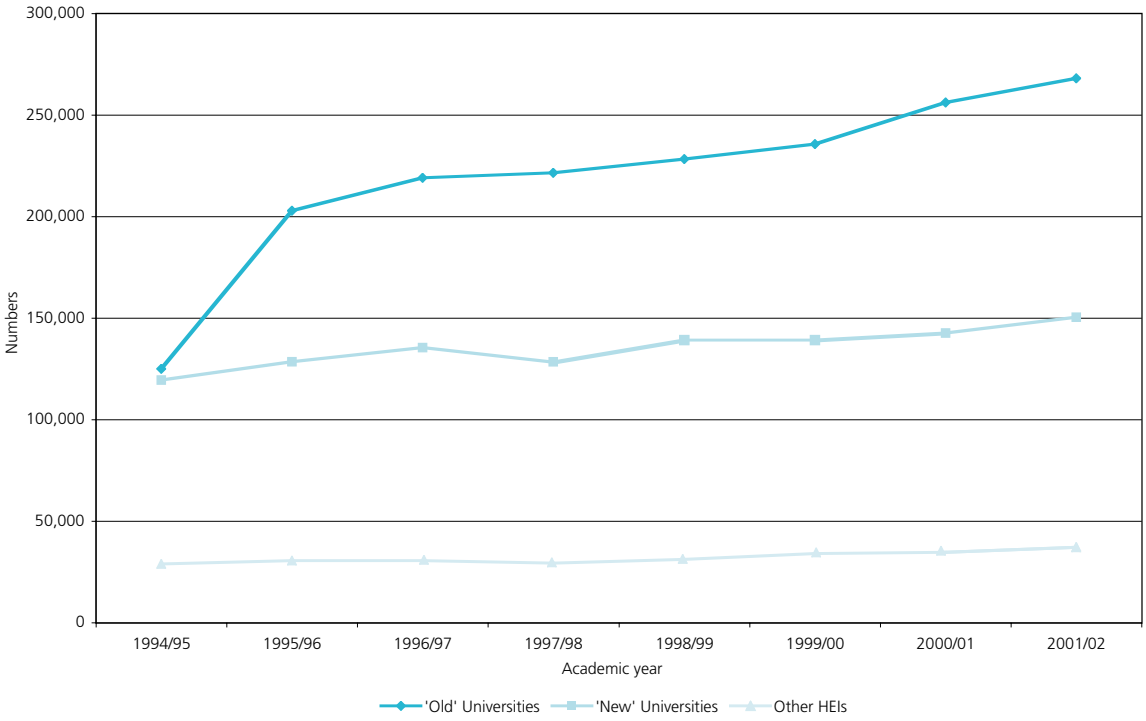
In 2002, 89% of UCAS accepted applicants to pre-1992 universities held GCE/GNVQ awards. The comparable figure for post-1992 universities was 69%; and for other types of institution, 63%.

Significant changes to the post-16 curriculum were introduced from September 2000. *Curriculum 2000* or *Qualifying for Success* reforms were designed to encourage the offer of broader packages of qualifications at advanced level, with learners typically studying more subjects, and being able to mix general and vocational subjects. These reforms pave the way for a more diverse pattern of prior educational attainment in the future.

Modes of study

In 1994 there were 274,000 part-time undergraduate students (24% of the total). By 2001 this had risen to 456,000 (33% of the total). The graph below shows that the majority of this growth has taken place in the pre-1992 universities.

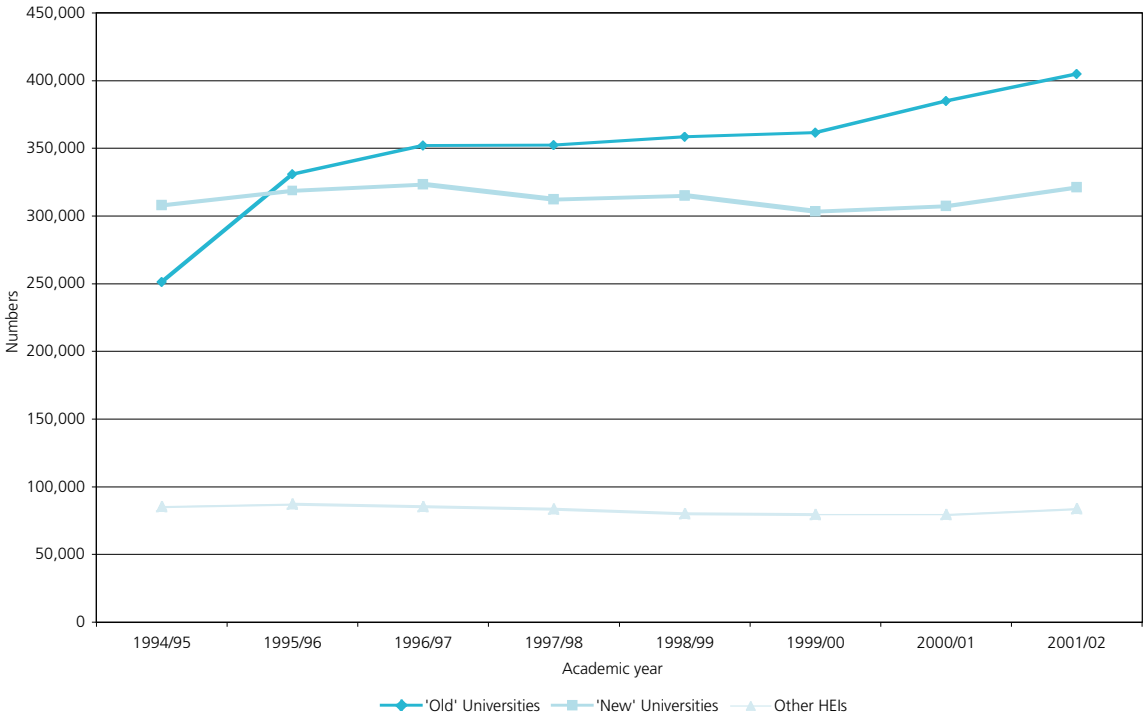
Graph 4: Distribution of part-time undergraduate students by type of establishment



Age profile

In 1994 there were 644,000 'mature' (over 21) undergraduates in the UK, representing 57% of the total. By 2001 this had risen to 810,000, remaining at broadly the same proportion of the total (58%). Graph 5 shows that there are now more mature students in pre-1992 than post-1992 universities. Mature students account for a slightly higher proportion of the overall undergraduate student population at post-1992 institutions.

Graph 5: Distribution of mature undergraduate students by type of establishment



Ethnic minority participation

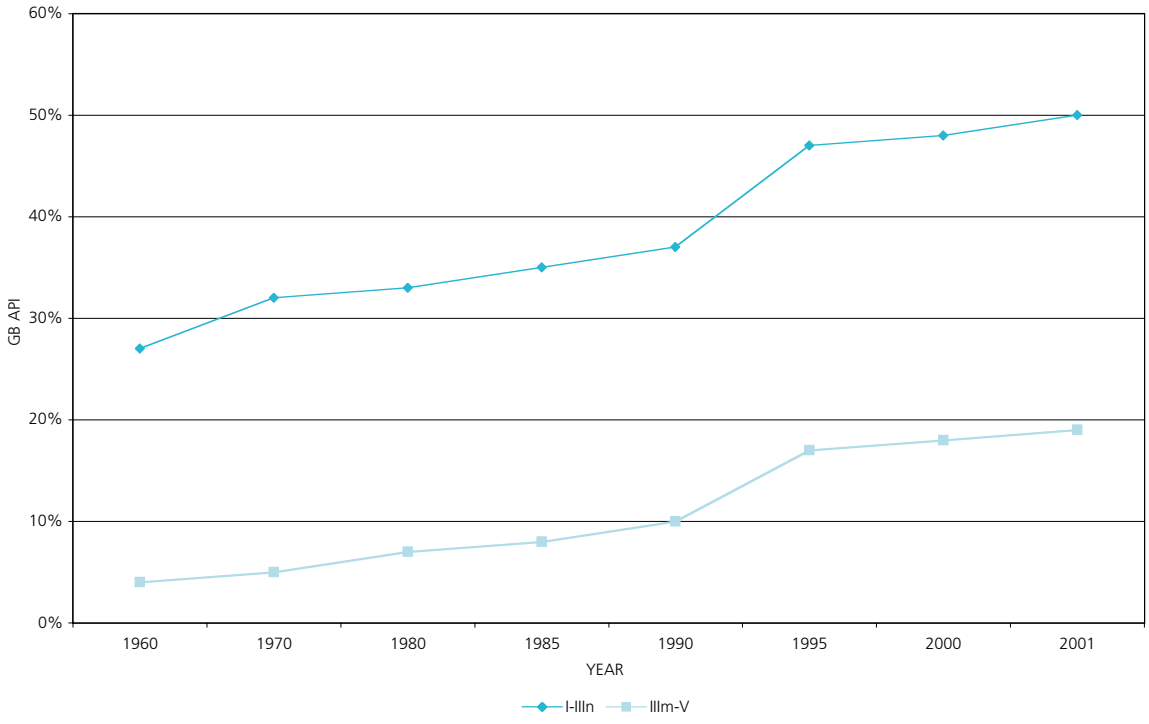
As a whole, the evidence suggests that people from minority ethnic groups are over-represented in higher education in this country. Minority ethnic students accounted for 14% of all full-time and part-time HE students in 2001/02, compared with 9% of 18-24 year olds in the population. UCAS figures for 2002 entry show that 16% of students aged 18-24 accepted for entry to full-time undergraduate courses were from minority ethnic groups.

The same evidence suggests that some groups - such as Bangladeshi women and black Afro-Caribbean men - are under-represented, and black students tend to start HE later in life. However, owing to the uncertainty in the data available for calculating participation rates, care has to be taken in drawing firm conclusions about any such over- or under-representation in higher education.

Social class

The main way in which the HE sector has remained very little changed has been social composition. By 2001, the overall age participation index was 35%, but this headline figure obscures a more complex picture. Around half of the UK population describe themselves as working in occupations which are classified as skilled (manual), partly skilled or unskilled. Yet, in 2001, just 19% of young people from these backgrounds were benefiting from higher education. While this was an increase of 8 percentage points on the position in 1991, the increase in participation by people from families with professional and non-manual occupations was 15 percentage points (from 35% to 50%). In terms of percentage points, the gap in participation between those in higher and lower social classes has grown (see graph 6 below). However, it also true that the gap in terms of likelihood of participating has narrowed, with those from higher social groups around three times more likely to participate in HE today rather than six times more likely to do so 30 years ago.

Graph 6: HE Participation Rates by Social Class Groups 1960 to 2001



5. Factors underlying the social composition of HE

The principal cause of the differential participation in HE by social class is the big discrepancy in prior educational attainment. For example, only 23% of those from manual backgrounds gain two or more A-levels by the age of 18 compared to 47% from non-manual backgrounds. Differences in attainment are evident before the age of two years, and analysis suggests that three-quarters of the 30 percentage point gap in higher education participation can be attributed to differences in the level of attainment by the age of 16. Thirty per cent of children with parents from unskilled occupations achieve five or more good GSCEs, compared to 69% of children whose parents are professional or managerial.

Improving prior attainment is therefore the main route to widening participation to higher education in the long term. The fact that around nine out of ten students who obtain two or more A-levels currently enter higher education by age 21, and that this progression rate is fairly even over all social classes, demonstrates the importance of prior attainment. We also know that of those who obtain 25 or more A-level points by the age of 18, 97% from non-manual socio-economic groups go on to higher education, as do 94% from the three manual socio-economic groups.

i) Participation by social class and type of university

The picture is even more complex than suggested by the figures in Section 4 above. There are significant differences in participation by social class at different types of university. For example, 16% of those admitted in 2000 by the 19 Russell Group universities[1] were from the three social classes covering the most disadvantaged groups, compared with the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) benchmark figure of 19 per cent. As the benchmark already takes account of prior attainment levels, these figures show that prior attainment cannot be the sole factor in patterns of entry to higher education. Even where young people from disadvantaged groups have obtained the appropriate qualifications for these universities, they are less likely to go there.

A similar result emerged from a study by the Sutton Trust of the top 13 universities as measured by press league tables. Of the 300,000 of the nation's schoolchildren from less affluent social backgrounds, only 4,200 (just over 1%) get into one of the top 13 universities instead of the 5,100 who might be expected to. Of the 200,000 who live in poor areas, 2,100 (just over 1%) get in instead of the 2,600 expected.

1 The 'Russell Group' universities are Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, Warwick, Imperial College, London, Kings College, London, London School of Economics and Political Science, and University College London

The evidence shows that it is differential rates of application rather than bias in admissions procedures that is the main cause of this under-representation of disadvantaged groups in top universities. Of those who achieve very good A-levels, a significant number are choosing not to apply to those universities for which there is strong competition for places, but which may provide a good match for their talents.

ii) Participation by type of school attended

HEFCE performance indicators also show that even taking into account the tough entrance qualifications required at some leading higher education institutions, and the subject mix, they are recruiting fewer students from state schools and colleges than might be expected.

At the top five universities defined by the Sutton Trust as measured by press league tables (Oxford, Imperial College London, Cambridge, London School of Economics and Political Science, University College London), the proportion of entrants from independent schools and colleges is much higher than might be expected.

Nationally, while about 7% of the school population (all ages) are in independent schools, people from independent schools account for 18% of the young full-time university population. Furthermore, of all candidates taking A-levels in 2001, over 15% were from independent schools. This is linked to differing A-level achievement according to school type; in 2000, over 92% of 17 year old candidates at independent schools obtained two or more A/AS levels, compared with 86% of their counterparts at state schools.

Appendix 2

Higher Education admissions: the place of prior attainment and factors that can affect its predictive ability

Summary

- Prior attainment appears to be the best single indicator of final degree outcome.
- School type tends to distort the predictive or signalling ability of prior attainment. Among students with the same degree outcome, the A-level grades of those who attended independent schools were on average two to four points (one to two grades) higher than those of students in LEA schools. This effect is weaker among students achieving higher grades.
- School performance may also affect the predictive ability of prior attainment. In England, evidence of the school performance effect across all universities is inconsistent, though it may be otherwise at institutional level. Admissions practices in the US implicitly acknowledge the effect of school performance by considering class rank in the assessment process, or even admitting by class rank.

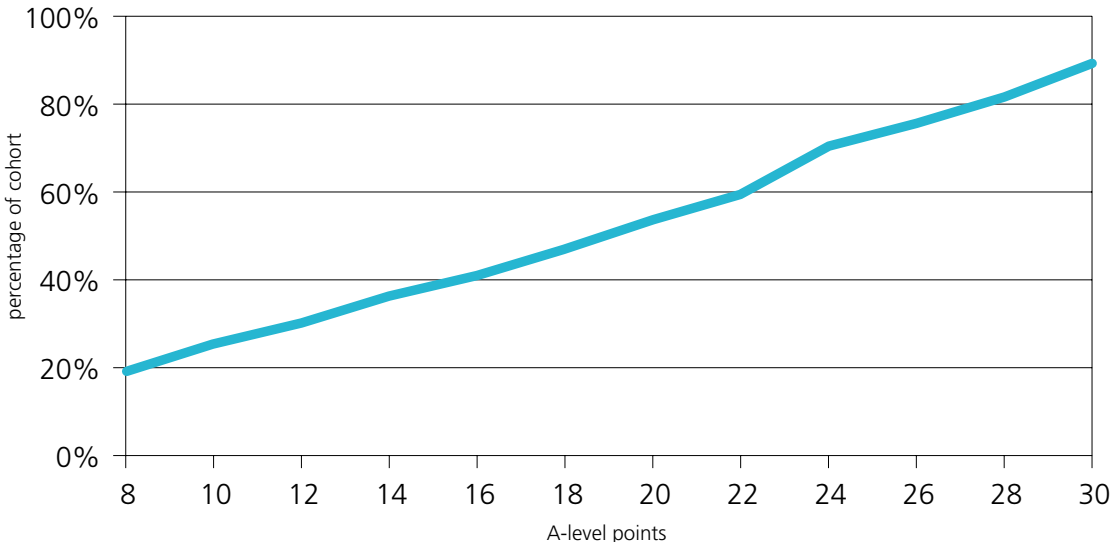
1. Introduction

This appendix considers the relationship between prior attainment and performance in higher education (HE), and the related issue of the role of prior attainment in HE admissions decisions. It examines these issues in relation only to young students (not to mature students).

2. Prior attainment and degree outcomes

Evidence indicates that prior attainment is a reasonably good indicator of final degree outcome, and is probably the best single indicator. This is well illustrated by a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) study.[1] This report models relationships using a large data set of HESA student records, UCAS data files and DFES school performance tables for 18 year olds entering HE in 1997/98 via A-levels, excluding those studying medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and architecture. The report charts the relationship between the percentage of a cohort obtaining a first or upper second degree and A-level points as follows:

Graph 1: % cohort first or upper second by A-level points



Smith and Naylor reach a similar conclusion. Using a data set of 48,800 home students under the age of 23 who attended English schools and were 1993 university leavers they find that "for men and women, an extra two points (ie one grade) raises the probability of a good degree by around 5 percentage points." And that "this effect is not linear, in that a student increasing their A level score from 28 to a maximum of 30 points increases the probability of a 'good' degree by 17.2 percentage points for males and by 11.5 percentage points for females."[2]

A fuller review of these and other studies is included in the report of the *Fair enough?* project.[3] The common finding is that A-levels do predict degree performance, but that the strength of the 'signal' varies.

1 Higher Education Funding Council for England (2003). Earlier studies should be treated with caution, given the substantial changes to both the secondary and higher education system in recent decades. This includes more recent studies, such as Peers and Johnston (1994), that use earlier data.
2 Smith and Naylor (2002).
3 Universities UK (2003), Section 1.3.

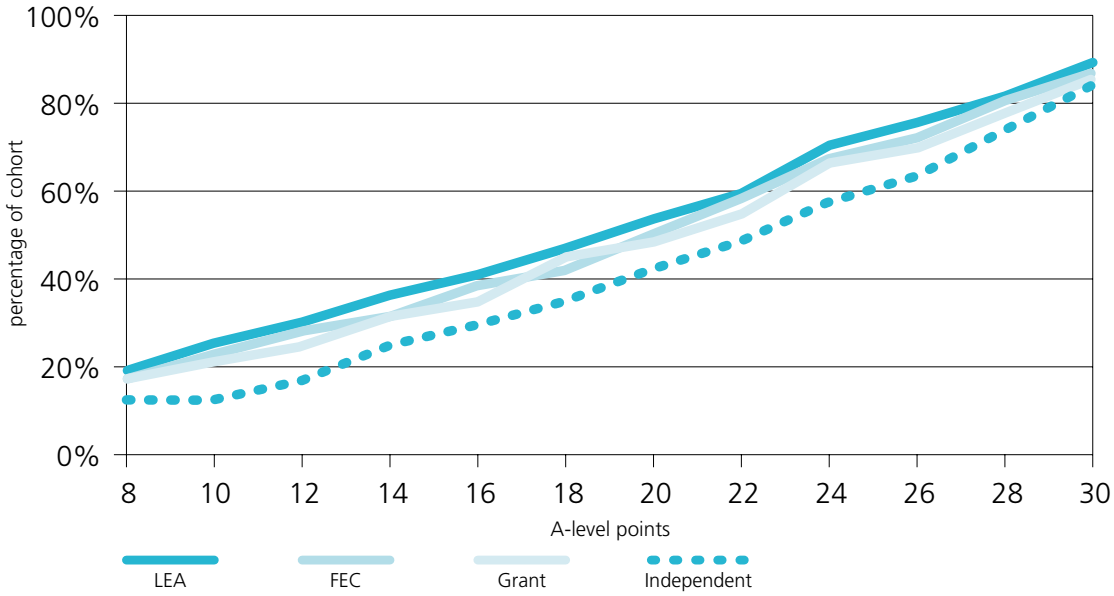
3. Factors that might affect the prior attainment signal

While evidence indicates that prior attainment is the best single indicator of HE attainment, other factors may affect its signalling ability. This section considers three such factors: school type, school performance, and class rank.

School type

The HEFCE study indicates that the type of school attended may have an effect, with students from independent schools, on average, having lower HE attainment than otherwise similar students.[4] The size of the effect is equivalent to around one to four A-level points (equal to two grades) and is smallest at the highest A-level grades. Consequently, the school type effect may be reduced for the most selective institutions. This is illustrated in the following graph.

Graph 2: % cohort first or upper second by A-level points and school type



Smith and Naylor have undertaken three pieces of work relevant to the impact of school type on HE performance.

4 Higher Education Funding Council for England (2003).

They use a data set of 94,000 students, the full cohort of university leavers in 1993. They conclude that "a student who previously attended an independent school is about nine percentage points less likely to obtain a good degree than an otherwise equivalent student who had attended an LEA school". They also find that to equalise the chances of obtaining a first class degree between students from the maintained and independent sectors, students from the independent sector would require higher grades, by about three points.[5]

Smith and Naylor also look at the probability of withdrawal for students leaving 'traditional' universities in 1990-1993. They conclude that a student who had previously attended an independent school was about four percentage points more likely to drop out than an otherwise similar student who had previously attended a maintained school.[6]

Smith and Naylor undertake further work in this area with a slightly different data set (previously described in Section 2). They estimate that "... on average, a male (female) graduate who attended an independent school is 6.5 (5.4) percentage points less likely to obtain a 'good' degree than a student who attended an LEA school, *ceteris paribus*."[7] They further note a variation in the independent school effect: "About 85% (93%) of male (female) students educated in Independent schools have the probability of a 'good' degree substantially (that is, more than about seven (five) percentage points) lower than those of comparable students educated in the LEA school sector. But for both males and females, a sizeable minority have either no or positive effects relative to those educated in LEA schools".[8] They then proceed to investigate possible reasons for this and find that the negative school type effect is associated with the level of school fees and that this effect is stronger for more expensive schools. This negative effect is sizable for both males and females but is statistically significant only for males.

Odell examines the relationship between A-level scores of all of the University of Bristol's 1998 graduates, the average scores of the schools they attended and their final degree results (see below). He also looked at school type effects, but found no significant impact for these students at Bristol, all of whom would have been in the upper ranges of attainment at A-level.

Possible reasons for this school type effect are worth considering and Smith and Naylor examine various hypotheses. An important question for HE admissions is how much, if any, of this improved performance carries through to final degree performance. Smith and Naylor's work indicates that not all of it does and that the greater the resource an independently educated pupil receives, the greater is this temporary boost.[9]

5 Smith and Naylor (2001a).
6 Smith and Naylor (2001b).
7 Smith and Naylor (2002).
8 ibid, p11.
9 Smith and Naylor (2002), p13.

School performance

Odell's work on the 1998 cohort of Bristol graduates[10] found that "when school performance was compared with degree grade, on average the students who did best at school also did best at this University. But there was not a dramatic difference in degree grade between the best and the worst performers at A-level. Some students, who had scraped into University with less than brilliant A-levels, obtained a First Class Degree at Bristol, and on the other hand some of those with top A-level scores gained a Third Class Degree."

He found that, on the whole, of all the students who entered the University with excellent A-levels, those who came from weaker schools gained better degrees than the students from stronger schools.

The study concluded that: "Bristol does not recruit effectively from schools in the lower half of the national league table for A-level performance. The picture that emerges is that, across all subjects, students who enter from schools where they have suffered relative educational disadvantage do just as well as those from the best schools, in spite of achieving lower A-level scores. This should justify lower offers and *favourable* treatment for those applicants from the lowest achieving schools (say < 16 points)."

HEFCE have used their large data sets to test this relationship but conclude that these effects lack consistency: "that is under certain conditions, students from poorly performing schools are expected to do less well in HE than similar students from better performing schools. Whether a student from the poorly performing school does better or worse can depend on A-level points, the gender of the student, the subject of study in HE and the measure of the HE achievement used." For instance, the effects for males and females appear to be quite different. For male students there is a positive school performance effect for students with less than 28 points (ie, other things being equal, students from lower attainment schools will outperform students from high attainment schools). This increases in strength for lower attainment students to four points (equal to two grades) for students with five to 10 points. For female students the effect is never greater than one point (half a grade) and is as likely to be negative (at lower grades) as positive (at higher grades).[11]

10 Odell (1999).
11 Higher Education Funding Council for England (2003).

Class rank and school performance

US universities standardly consider an applicant's academic score (Grade Point Average, or GPA) in the context of his or her class rank (based on four years of high school performance) and the average performance of the applicant's high school.[12]

The ability of class rank to help indicate success at university has resulted in percentage plans at several US universities. Such plans guarantee admission to HE to the top X% of a high school class: in Texas,10%; in California, 4%, and 4-12% with conditions; and in Florida, 20%. There is some evidence of the impact of school class rank on HE performance from Texas. Since 1998, within the state of Texas, students who are ranked in the Top 10% of their school during their penultimate year of schooling are guaranteed a place at an institution of their choice within the public HE system in Texas. About 2,400 students are admitted each year as undergraduates to the University of Texas-Austin (UTA) with about half of these being admitted as Top 10% students. Texas A&M University (TAMU) also has similar numbers. There are two indicators from their data relating to subsequent performance. It should be noted that both indicators use SAT scores, which at least in principle measure potential rather than acquisition of knowledge and are thus not the same as A-levels.[13] The indicators also use very broad SAT bands, which makes the correlation less precise.

Freshman Year performance: the Texas data showed that the average freshman year performance of Top 10% students exceeds that of non-Top 10% students at every SAT level. Top 10% students also perform as well as their non-Top 10% classmates with SAT scores 200 to 300 points higher. This is true for most SAT bands at TAMU and for all colleges and for all racial/ethnic groups at UTA. If it is assumed that Top 10% students who would not otherwise have entered HE are in the lower SAT bands, then their mean performances is equal to non-Top 10% students with SAT scores of 200 points more. This indicates that generally they do not struggle once they are admitted to these 'flagship' universities.[14]

First year persistence levels: the table below shows the percentage of students from the summer and fall 1999 entering class who returned to UTA for the start of their sophomore year in fall 2000. The data is presented within selected categories of high school class rank and SAT total test score. If it is again assumed that Top 10% students who might not otherwise have been admitted to UTA have lower SAT scores, then their persistence rates exceed those of all students in the next SAT band but with lower class ranks. They also exceed those of students with SAT scores in the highest two bands but with second, third or fourth quartile class rankings. This suggests that students admitted through the Top 10% plan who would not otherwise have been admitted to UTA do not generally drop out.

12 Class rank and Grade Point Average are included on application forms. High school average performance is not, but is readily available elsewhere.
13 A correlation of the relationship between GPA, class rank and undergraduate performance could not be located. This may be because GPA is seen to be too affected by school context to be a standard measure.
14 See http://wwwl.utexas.edu/student/rese4arch/reports/admissions/HB588-Report4.htm

University of Texas-Austin, first year persistence levels by class rank and SAT band (1999 entry)

	High school class rank			
SAT total test score interval	**top 10%**	**11 to 25%**	**2nd quarter**	**bottom half**
400-1100	91%	81%	68%	52%
1110-1200	93%	87%	82%	67%
1210-1310	92%	91%	85%	63%
1320-1600	96%	94%	84%	83%

We do not have evidence of the reasons for this pattern. It could be that highly ranked pupils in low participation/attainment schools are not given a full range of opportunities to develop their ability and so tend to coast along. As a consequence, their exam scores do not display their full potential but when they move into the HE environment there are more opportunities for their potential to be fully developed.

It should be noted that even if Top X% plans illustrate the effect of class rank, they appear to be having limited success in increasing the diversity of the student body.[15]

4. Fine-tuning the signal: the feasibility of selected options

The criteria for selecting students are debated elsewhere in this consultation document. This appendix assumes that HEIs will seek to recruit the students who are less likely to drop out and more likely to obtain high grades at university. If this is the case, then there may be an argument for acknowledging the distorting effect of school type and (in some circumstances) school performance on prior attainment. HEIs may well need to consider a range of more complex and individualised factors as well, as discussed in the main text of the consultation paper. This section explores the practicability of three relatively simple options.

15 See for example Horne and Flores (2003).

School type effect

Acknowledging school type effect could have drawbacks. It might not work in all subjects at all universities, as some undergraduate curricula require a sound existing grasp of a specific body of knowledge and/or competence in specific skills. It could unfairly disadvantage students who attend the minority of independent schools that have either no effect or a negative effect on A-level attainment. The work of Smith and Naylor (2002) indicates that this could affect the 15% (7%) of male (female) students in independent schools charging lower fees. Finally, the school type effect is weakest at the upper end of the performance scale. Since such students are more likely to apply to selective institutions – which is where differentiation is needed most – this approach is unlikely to be of much help.

Class rank and school performance

Acknowledging school performance effect and class rank could be more feasible. It would involve weighting GCSE scores so that:

- the scores of all students from low-performing schools were worth more (the evidence for this is inconsistent); and
- the scores of students ranking highly in their schools, whatever the average school performance, were worth more (this option could be seen to reward hard work, whatever students' circumstances).

US universities use four years of internally assessed results to calculate GPA and thus class rank. The simplest option for UK universities would be to calculate class rank through GCSE grades. The method of calculating score and rank would need to be given careful consideration.

Top X% programs

The extension of class rank to a percentage system as operated in some states in the US could not be transferred unaltered to the UK. There are several reasons for this. First, the public HE system in the US is organised by state. Many top ranking students would attend their state university anyway. Secondly, the universities of Texas and California are big: each has several large campuses and is a lot larger than a single HEI in the UK. They are thus able to absorb additional students admitted via a percentage plan. Thirdly, admission in the US is to a university. The freshman year generally offers a broad curriculum; only in the second year do students specialise significantly. This offers flexibility in admitting students who might not have the specific curriculum coverage or skills and competencies necessary for some first-year courses at English universities.

Is this already happening?

Some universities are already making adjustments in the offers they make. As a part of the *Excellence Challenge* evaluation (forthcoming) a postal survey of 120 HEIs took place in April 2002. Of the 56 respondents, 35 (65%) had strategies for admitting disadvantaged students. Seven (13%) make lower offers for places as a part of these strategies. Twenty (36%) of the 56 consider a school with lower than average GCE A-level results as a factor to take into account when recruiting students. Universities are trialling various additional ways of assessing applicants (see paragraph C7 of main text of consultation document).

A recent HEFCE survey of academics also found that 42% of respondents gave reduced A-level point offers to applicants from under-represented groups.[16]

Many selective HEIs have in place strategies to acknowledge the role of school performance for at least a proportion of applicants.

16 See HEFCE (2003b). *Evaluation of the HEFCE Widening Participation Support Strategy.* Bristol:HEFCE.
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Appendix 3

University of California: Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions

I. Overview

On May 20, 1988, The Regents of the University of California adopted a University of California Policy on Undergraduate Admissions. The Policy states in part that:

> Mindful of its mission as a public institution, the University of California… seeks to enroll, on each of its campuses, a student body that, beyond meeting the University's eligibility requirements, demonstrates high academic achievement or exceptional personal talent, and that encompasses the broad diversity of cultural, racial, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds characteristic of California.

In December 1995, following passage the previous July of Regents Resolution SP-1, a task force convened by the President of the University reviewed existing *Guidelines for the Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions* and recommended substantive changes. The revised *Guidelines* were issued in July 1996 and revised in May 2000 to reflect the University's newly adopted Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) policy.

In May 2001, The Regents adopted Resolution RE-28, which rescinded Resolution SP-1 and reaffirmed the goals of the 1988 Policy as follows:

> the University shall seek our and enrol, on each of its campuses, a student body that demonstrates high academic achievement or exceptional personal talent, and that encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California.

Following the passage of RE-28, the President asked the Academic Senate to consider the adoption of evaluation procedures that would look at applicants in a comprehensive manner and would utilize a variety of measures of achievement.

1 These guidelines apply to those students eligible for admission. Up to 6 percent of new enrolled freshmen and 6 percent of new enrolled advanced standing students can be admitted by exception, as authorised by The Regents. Refer also to the Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception.

The present revision of the *Guidelines* follows extensive deliberation on the part of the Academic Senate, its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), and its individual campus divisions and faculty admissions committees undertaken during the summer of 2001. The work of the Academic Senate built on themes already developed by the 1995 Task Force. For example, the report of the Task Force commented on the "need for a comprehensive review of the methods used for assessing academic performance, beyond utilizing criteria such as GPA and standardized test scores" and suggested that "the selection process could be altered in the future to include a more comprehensive approach to reviewing students' academic accomplishments and personal backgrounds." The work of the Academic Senate should be considered as yet another step in the continuing evolution of undergraduate admissions practices and policies.

Effective with applicants seeking admission for the fall 2002 term and thereafter, the following revised guidelines and procedures shall be followed for implementation of the 1988 University of California Policy on Undergraduate Admissions and RE-28, adopted in May 2001.

These selection guidelines apply to campuses that have to select from a pool of eligible applicants and to students who have met the established UC eligibility requirements for admission[1]. These eligibility requirements are established by the University in conformance with the specifications outlined in the California Master Plan for Higher Education, which specifies that the top one-eighth of the State's public high school graduates, as well as those community college transfer students who have successfully completed specified college work, be eligible for admission to the University of California.

These guidelines provide the framework within which campuses shall establish specific criteria and procedures for the selection of undergraduate applicants to be admitted when the number of eligible applicants exceeds the places available.

1 These guidelines apply to those students eligible for admission. Up to 6 percent of new enrolled freshmen and 6 percent of new enrolled advanced standing students can be admitted by exception, as authorized by The Regents. Refer also to the Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception.

II. Guiding principles for comprehensive review

As part of its work on behalf of the Academic Senate, BOARS has adopted the following definition and principles to guide the formulation of individual admissions policies for campuses selecting among UC eligible applicants. Campus admissions procedures should involve a comprehensive review of applications. BOARS defines comprehensive review as:

> The process by which students applying to UC campuses are evaluated for admission using multiple measures of achievement and promise while considering the context in which each student has demonstrated academic accomplishment.

In designing campus procedures, campus admissions committees should adhere to the following guiding principles:

1. The admissions process honors academic achievement and accords priority to students of high academic accomplishment. At the same time, merit should be assessed in terms of the full range of an applicant's academic and personal achievements and likely contribution to the campus community, viewed in the context of the opportunities and challenges that the applicant has faced.

2. Campus admissions procedures should involve a comprehensive review of applications using a broad variety of factors to select an entering class.

3. No fixed proportion of applicants should be admitted based solely on a narrow set of criteria.

4. Campus policies should reflect continued commitment to the goal of enrolling classes that exhibit academic excellence as well as diversity of talents and abilities, personal experience, and backgrounds.

5. Faculty on individual campuses should be given flexibility to create admission policies and practices that, while consistent with University-wide criteria and policies, are also sensitive to local campus values and academic priorities.

6. The admission process should select students of whom the campus will be proud, and who give evidence that they will use their education to make contributions to the intellectual, cultural, social, and political life of the State and the Nation.

7. The admissions process should select those students who demonstrate a strong likelihood that they will persist to graduation.

8. Campus selection policies should ensure that no applicant will be denied admission without a comprehensive review of his or her file.

Faculty takes their responsibilities for admission and selection very seriously. BOARS anticipates that campuses will act autonomously in designing campus-specific policies and processes that are consistent with University-wide policies and guidelines. BOARS will continue to monitor campus policies and work with faculty to continuously improve the processes and outcomes.

III. Selection criteria

Campuses receiving applications in excess of the number required to achieve their enrolment target for a specific term shall select students for admission as follows:

A. Freshman Applicants

The following criteria provide a comprehensive list of factors campuses may use to select their admitted class. Based on campus-specific institutional goals and needs, admissions decisions will be based on a broad variety of factors to ensure attainment of the goals set forth in the 1988 University of California Policy on Undergraduate Admissions and RE-28.

1. Academic Grade Point Average (GPA) calculated on all academic courses completed in the subject areas specified by the University's eligibility requirements (the a-g subjects), including additional points for completion of University certified honors courses (see 4, below). It is recommended that the maximum value allowed for the GPA shall be 4.0.

2. Scores on the following tests: The Scholastic Assessment Test I or the American College Test, and the College Board Scholastic Assessment Test II: Subject Tests.

3. The number, content of, and performance in courses completed in academic subjects beyond the minimum specified by the University's eligibility requirements.

4. The number of and performance in University approved honors courses, College Board Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, and transferable college courses completed. It is recommended that caution be exercised in order not to assign excessive weight to these courses, especially if considerable weight already has been given in the context of 1, above. Additionally, in recognition of existing differences in availability of these courses among high schools, it is recommended that reviewers assess completion of this coursework against the availability of these courses at the candidate's secondary school.

5. Being identified as eligible in the local context, by being ranked in the top 4% of the class at the end of the junior year, as determined by academic criteria established by the University of California.

6. The quality of the senior year program, as measured by type and number of academic courses (see 3 and 4, above) in progress or planned.

7. The quality of academic performance relative to the educational opportunities available in the applicant's secondary school.

8. Outstanding performance in one or more specific academic subject areas.

9. Outstanding work in one or more special projects in any academic field of study.

10. Recent, marked improvement in academic performance, as demonstrated by academic grade point average and quality of coursework (see 3 and 4, above) completed and in progress, with particular attention being given to the last two years of high school.

11. Special talents, achievements, and awards in a particular field, such as in the visual and performing arts, in communication, or in athletic endeavours; special skills, such as demonstrated written and oral proficiency in other languages; special interests, such as intensive study and exploration of other cultures; or experiences that demonstrate unusual promise for leadership, such as significant community service or significant participation in student government; or other significant experiences or achievements that demonstrate the applicant's promise for contributing to the intellectual vitality of a campus.

12. Completion of special projects undertaken either in the context of the high school curriculum or in conjunction with special school events, projects or programs co-sponsored by the school, community organizations, post-secondary educational institutions, other agencies, or private firms, that offer significant evidence of an applicant's special effort and determination or that may indicate special suitability to an academic program on a specific campus.

13. Academic accomplishments in light of the applicant's life experiences and special circumstances. These experiences and circumstances may include, but are not limited to, disabilities, low family income, first generation to attend college, need to work, disadvantaged social or educational environment, difficult personal and family situations or circumstances, refugee status, or veteran status.

14. Location of the applicant's secondary school and residence. These factors shall be considered in order to provide for geographic diversity in the student population and also to account for the wide variety of educational environments existing in California.

B. Advanced Standing Applicants

Advanced standing applicants shall be selected by each campus using the criteria listed below as well as criteria 11-14 listed above. Priority consideration for admission of advanced standing applicants shall be given to upper division junior transfers from California Community Colleges.

Criteria to Select Advanced Standing Applicants

1. Completion of a specified pattern or number of courses that meet breadth or general education requirements.

2. Completion of a specified pattern or number of courses that provide continuity with upper division courses in the major.

3. Grade point average in all transferable courses, and, in particular, grade point average in lower division courses required for the applicant's intended major.

4. Participation in academically selective honors courses or programs.

(Refer to items 2 through 6 in Section A above for additional criteria to consider.)

IV. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

A common filing period for submission of applications shall be established by the Office of the President in consultation with the campuses. These dates shall be observed by all campuses and may be extended only if a campus determines that additional applications are required to meet enrolments targets. All applications submitted during the prescribed dates shall receive equal consideration for admission.

Applications shall file one application on which they shall indicate all the campuses where they wish to be considered for admission.

Campuses shall observe and publish a common notification period for notifying applicants of their admission status.

V. ACCOMMODATION OF UC ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

UC eligible resident applicants, who have not been admitted at any of the campuses of their choice shall be offered a space at other UC campuses where space is available. This process, called referral, reaffirms the long-standing University commitment to provide a place for every eligible California applicant who wishes to enroll.

In addition to the referral process, campuses may choose to offer other enrolment alternatives to UC eligible applicants. Examples of such alternatives may include:

1. Fall term admission to a different major,

2. Deferred admission to another term; or,

3. Enrollment at a community college with provision for admission at a later time, if a stated level of academic achievement is maintained (for freshman applicants only).

Appendix 4

Terms of reference and membership of the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group

(as announced to Parliament, 22 May 2003)

The terms of reference of the project will be as follows:
To report to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the options which English institutions providing Higher Education should consider adopting in assessing the merit of applicants and their achievement and potential for different types of courses.

To report on practical implementation of such options using evidence-based good practice.

To report on the high-level principles underpinning such approaches which institutions would be expected to adopt.

The Group should consider in particular:
a) the need to reinforce public confidence in the fairness and transparency of admissions arrangements;
b) the diversity in the missions of providers of Higher Education, and of their students;
c) maintaining the autonomy of institutions in academic matters including the systems and processes by which applicants are admitted.

The report to the Secretary of State should be submitted by May 2004 following a period of consultation with universities and the wider public.

Professor Schwartz will be supported by a steering group whose membership will be as follows:

Professor Sir Colin Campbell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham

Mrs Pauline Davies, Headmistress, Wycombe Abbey School, High Wycombe

Mr John Gardiner, Chairman, TESCO plc

Ms Janet Graham, Head of the Admissions Office, University of Cambridge

Professor Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England

Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman, Sutton Trust

Mr Anthony McClaran, acting Chief Executive, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Mr John Morgan, Headteacher, Conyers School, Yarm, Stockton-on-Tees

Dr Bernadette Porter, Rector and Chief Executive, University of Surrey Roehampton

Dr Alan Stanhope, Principal, Cornwall College of Further Education, St Austell

In addition, Professor Schwartz and the steering group may seek specialist advice from other persons and organisations.

Enquiries

If you have a query relating to the policy content of the consultation you can contact Sophie Parsons:

Telephone: **0114 259 1619**

Fax: **0114 259 3805**

Email: **Admissions.Review-Enquiries@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact:

Telephone: **01928 794 888**

Fax: **01928 794 311**

E-mail: **Consultation.Unit@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**

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Alternatively, you can view and respond to the consultation on our website: **www.admissions-review.org.uk**

Copies of this document will be made available upon request in the most commonly used minority ethnic languages, and in audio and Braille.