

Evaluation of Advancing Access

Report in Detail

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1. Introduction

Advancing Access is a collaborative programme led by twenty-four UK universities to deliver an open-access online continuing professional development (CPD) resource for teachers and advisers with the aim of facilitating progression to leading universities. The resources and information presented on the website are designed to increase teachers' and advisers' knowledge and confidence in relation to progression to leading universities and challenge any misconceptions they may hold. Resources and online events are open access but the programme targets schools and colleges with low levels of progression to leading universities.

Advancing Access, hosted by the University of Nottingham, was established using funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) National Networks for Collaborative Outreach scheme. HEFCE funding ended in December 2017 and it has since been funded by its partner universities, the twenty-four universities in the Russell Group. This evaluation is independently conducted by the School of Education at Durham University.

This evaluation report covers the period from Advancing Access' website launch in September 2016 to September 2017. There were two main phases of data collection, as illustrated in the timeline below (Figure 1). The first covered Advancing Access' pilot phase running September 2016 to April 2017. Strand 1 was launched at the start of this period and an online virtual conference was held in November 2016. A report on this phase was produced in 2016. The second phase of data collection covered the period following the full launch in May 2017 to late September 2017. Three further strands of resources were launched and a second virtual conference took place.

As shown in Figure 1 September – December represents a key period each year for Advancing Access users, when schools and advisers support students with university applications. The timing of this evaluation report means that very little data on this key period in the main phase could be included.

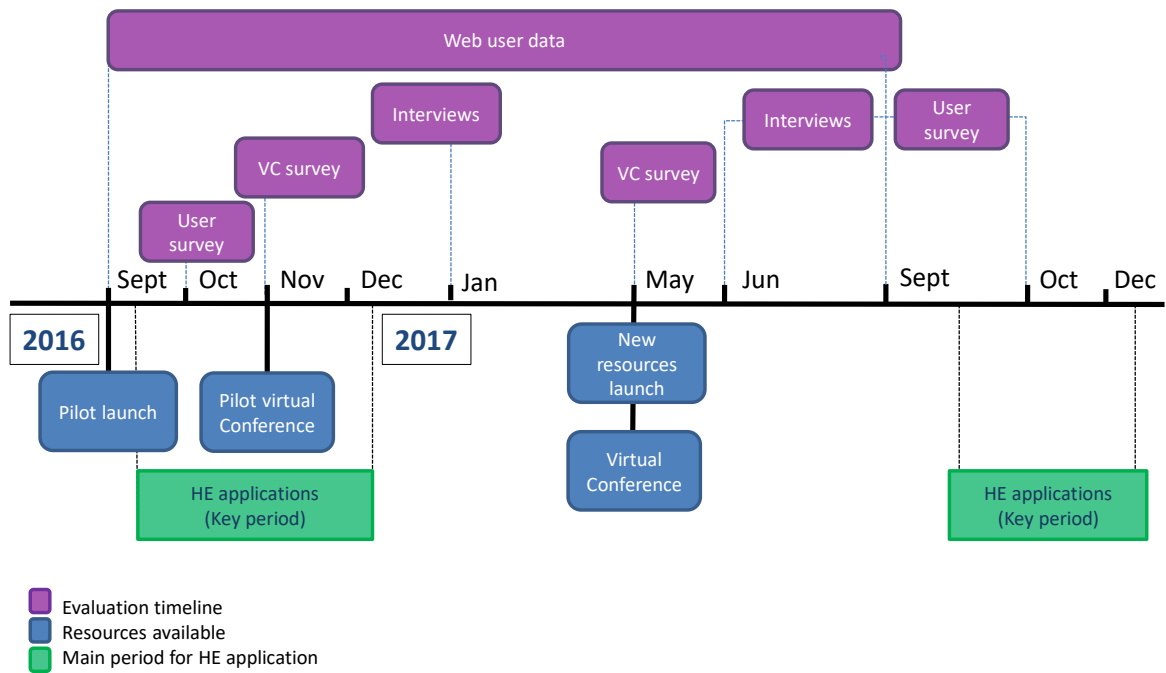


Figure 1 Timeline of Advancing Access development and evaluation data collection

1.1 Evaluation questions

The key research questions at the outset of the evaluation were:

1. Does the intervention increase knowledge of enabling factors for progression to leading universities for teachers and advisers?
2. Does the intervention support attitudinal change regarding leading universities for teachers and advisers?
3. If changes in knowledge and attitudes take place for teachers and advisers, how does this affect learners?
4. Does the intervention increase the likelihood of higher-achieving learners at KS4 progressing to study facilitating subjects at KS5?
5. Does the intervention increase the likelihood of higher-achieving learners at KS5 making high-quality applications to leading universities?
6. Has the intervention reached the intended audience?
7. How is the intervention used by the schools and colleges at which it is targeted?

Given the timeline of the evaluation, it has not been possible to fully address all these questions. A key focus of this report is research question 6, has the intervention reached the intended audience. Questions 1 and 2, and to an extent question 7, are answered by surveys and interviews of website users and virtual conference attendees.

The most difficult questions to answer in the time frame are questions 3, 4 and 5. Learners have not yet been exposed to much of the intervention, and no quantitative data is yet available on the progression of learners to facilitating subjects or higher education. Opportunities for exploring these questions further in future are addressed in the discussion section (page 54).

2. Advancing Access website and resources

The main method of delivery for Advancing Access is the website www.advancingaccess.ac.uk. The website contains four strands of CPD resources aimed at teachers and advisers. Strand 1: How do I help my students choose a university and course? was launched as a part of a pilot phase in September 2016, with three further strands of resources launched as a part of the full release in May 2017. The three further strands are as follows; Strand 2: How do I help my students apply to university?, Strand 3: How do admissions processes work?, Strand 4: How do I help my students make the right choices for post-16 study?

The cut-off date for data included in this report was 8 September 2017, meaning that we are only able to report on early indications of engagement with Advancing Access, particularly with strands 2-4.

The data on website usage used for this report was provided by Advancing Access. Details of the data and the cleaning and linking processes undertaken can be found in Appendix 1.

2.1 Characteristics of users

The Advancing Access website had 859 user accounts as of 8 September 2017. The accounts were categorised as part of the analysis and Table 1 below shows the number of accounts in each category.

Category	Number of accounts	Percentage
Secondary school or college	634	74%
Organisation	90	10%
University	36	4%
Independent school	54	6%
Unknown	16	2%
International	13	2%
Anonymous	13	2%
Primary school	2	0%
Independent primary school	1	0%
Total	859	

Table 1 Number and category of website user accounts

Three quarters of users were based in a secondary school or college. 10% of users were from organisations¹ – these included third sector organisations involved in social mobility, outreach and teacher training; several local authorities and county councils; and many users who appeared to be independent careers advisers: 35 users who were not based in a school or university identified themselves as ‘careers adviser’.

Users were categorised as being from a university when their email address or listed ‘school’ identified them as such – this includes several users working for NCOPs. As it was not always clear whether the user was working for a NCOP, it was felt more reliable to not list them separately. The ‘anonymous’ category was used where the details entered were clearly absurd or appeared to be designed to maintain anonymity (e.g. X X for first name and surname).

The majority of users were located in England and Wales, with three users in Northern Ireland (one grammar school, one primary school and one unknown user) and seven users in Scotland (five from independent schools, one from a university and one working for an organisation).

Figure 2 shows the location of Advancing Access users in the UK, along with Russell Group institutions

¹ Users were categorised as ‘organisation’ if they had listed their role as ‘careers adviser’ and not identified themselves with a particular school; if they had identified an organisation in the ‘school’ field or if their email address was associated with an existing organisation.

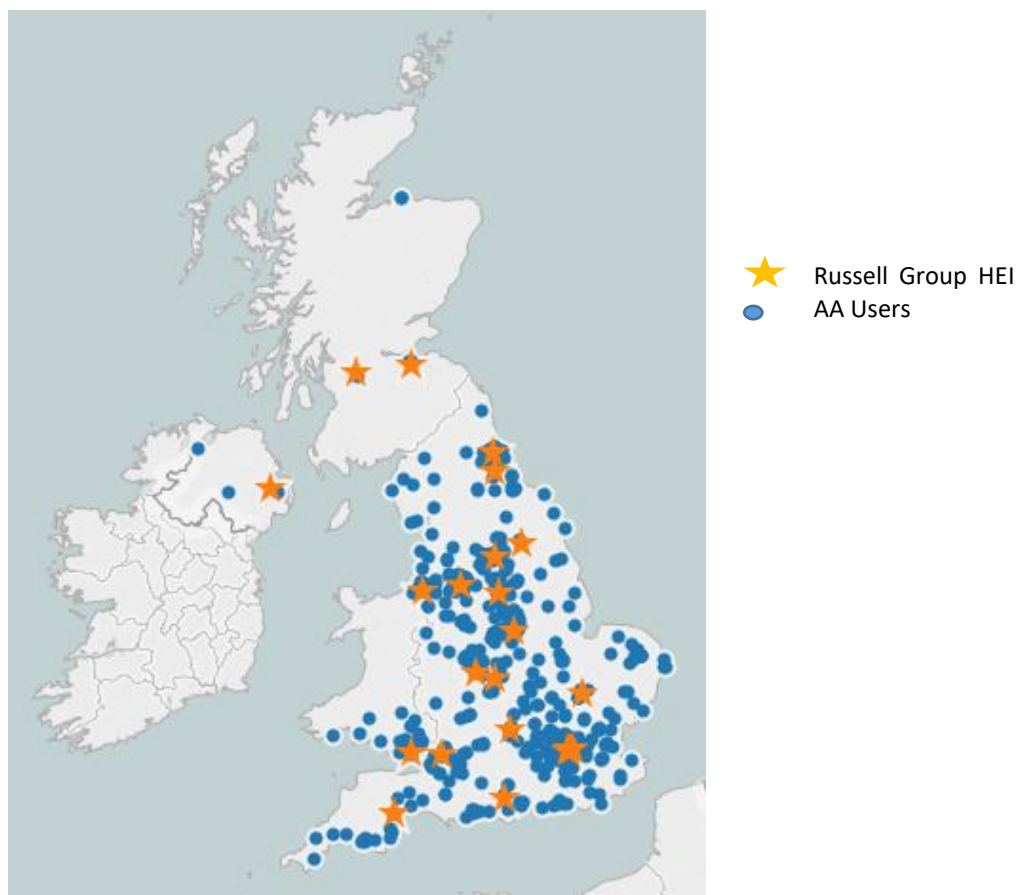


Figure 2 Map of UK-based Advancing Access account holders and Russell Group institutions

2.2 Schools and colleges

Of the 634 accounts associated with state-maintained secondary schools and colleges, the most common roles were careers adviser and other. Forty-nine accounts were student accounts; these were associated with nine different schools, with forty of the student accounts coming from two of these schools. Amongst teachers, head of year 12, head of year 13 and subject lead were the most frequent role choices. Details are shown in Table 2.

Role	Number of accounts	Percentage
Other	146	23%
Careers adviser	143	23%
[Null]	107	17%
Student	49	8%
Head of year 13	44	7%
Subject lead	42	7%
Head of year 12	40	6%
Most able coordinator	33	5%
Deputy head	23	4%
Enrichment officer	5	1%
Head teacher	1	0%
Head of year 8	1	0%
Total	634	

Table 2 Role of website users associated with secondary schools or colleges

These accounts are associated with 414 unique state schools and colleges; the characteristics of these are explored in more detail from Section 2.4.

2.3 Patterns of use

Usage of the Advancing Access website appears to be heavily influenced by promotional activity related to the release of new content. In Figure 3 below we see three spikes in account creation. The first, with 116 accounts created in the week commencing (w/c) 19th September 2016, coincides with the pilot launch of Advancing Access. The second spike of 87 accounts created w/c 31st October 2016 coincides with the return from October half term. The third, more gradual spike, with 54 accounts created w/c 8th May, 82 created w/c 15th May and a further 98 created w/c 22nd May 2017, reflects the relaunch of Advancing Access in May 2017 and the promotional activity undertaken around the three new strands of resources which were launched at this time.

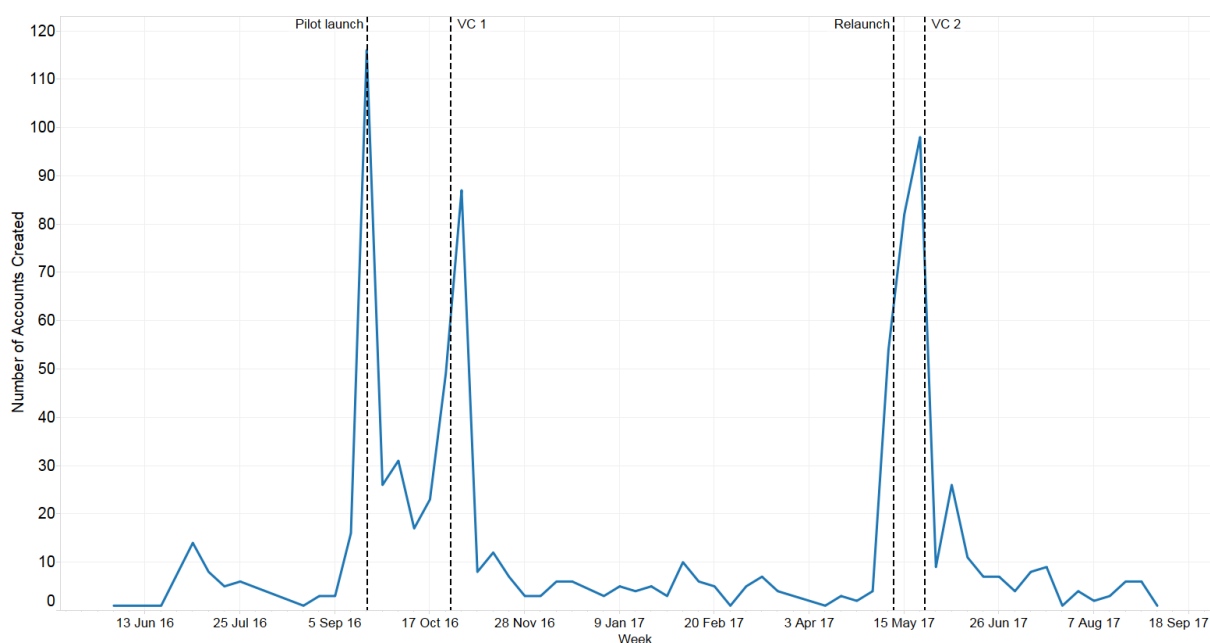


Figure 3 Number of accounts created each week, from Registered Accounts dataset. VC = virtual conference

The 'Tracking Events' dataset provided by Advancing Access shows each visit to a resource page² by a registered user. Figure 4 shows the number of resource views each week. The pattern reflects the creation of user accounts seen in Figure 3 although the May 2017 spike includes a much larger number of resource views (322 w/c 15th May and 524 w/c 22nd May 2017) due to the increased number of resources available on the website.

² Including the Virtual conference, see page 33 below. Virtual conference visits are excluded from the figures in the current section.

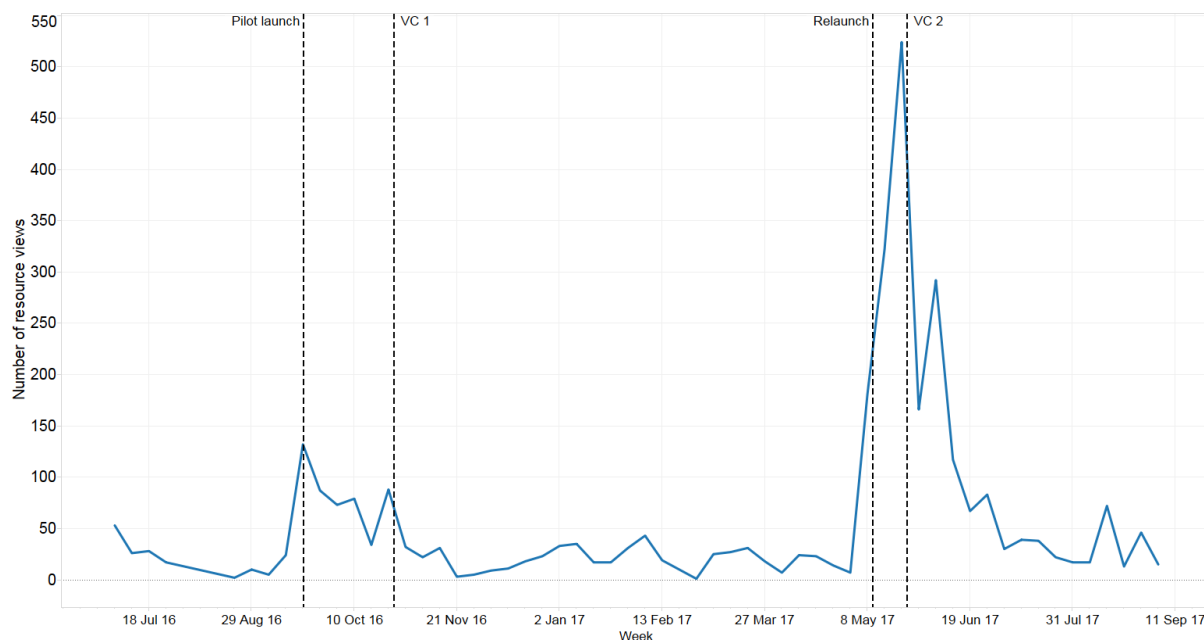


Figure 4 Number of resource views each week, from Tracking Events dataset . VC = virtual conference

Using this dataset it is also possible to see which resources were most frequently accessed. Figure 5) and Figure 6 show the number of views for each resource, presented by strand. Strand 1 has a much larger total of views than the other strands (N=1,852 compared with N=812, N=181 and N=380 for strands 2, 3 and 4 respectively), due to the earlier release date of this strand. (Note that for this reason, strands 2, 3 and 4 are presented on a different scale to strand 1.)

The information sheet called 'sources of information' was the most popular resource, with 306 views. There was a mismatch between some pairs of resources – for example, the instructions for the 'working with students' activity were viewed 259 times, but the accompanying worksheet only 170 times. Similarly there were 255 views of the 'How do I help my students choose a university and course?' presentation but only 113 views of the accompanying notes. This pattern is consistent across strands, with presentation notes being downloaded around half as frequently as the presentations in each strand.

Strand 1 also includes five video resources. These were accessed via the Vimeo website³ and the Advancing Access website and the numbers of views are shown in Table 3. The most popular video had been viewed 490 times, and the total number of views for all five videos was 1567.

Video	Number of views on Vimeo channel and Advancing Access website (at 17th October 2017)
Josh's story	338
Orin's story	144
Sarah's story	229
Sharn's story	366
Mayowa's story	490
Total	1567

Table 3 Number of views for strand 1 (choosing my university and course) videos on Advancing Access Vimeo channel

³ <https://vimeo.com/user49089072> accessed at 17 October 2017.

Resource Views for Strand 1

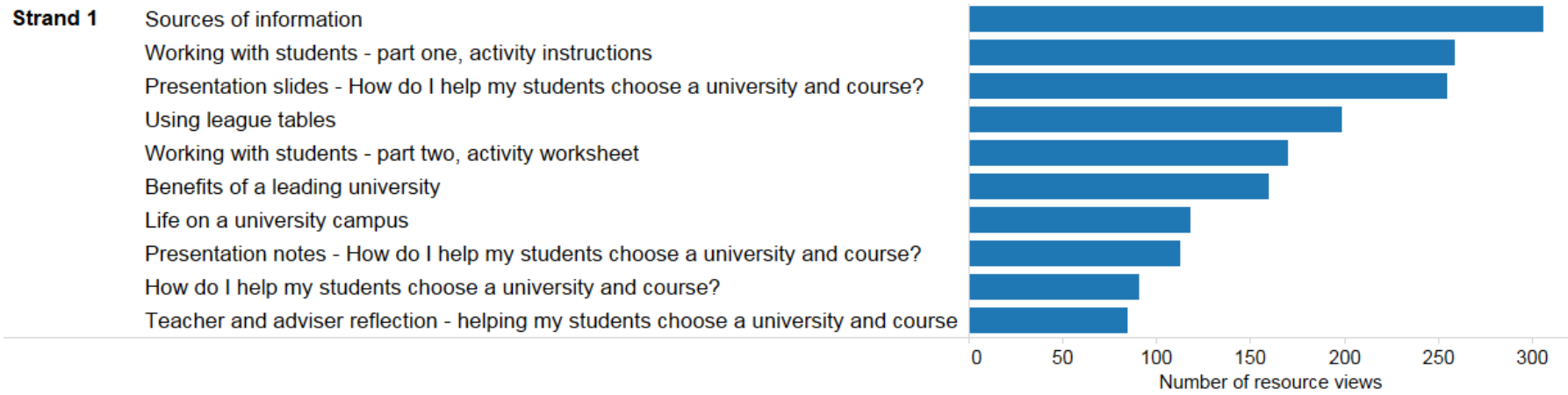


Figure 5 Number of resource views: Strand 1

Resource Views for Strands 2-4

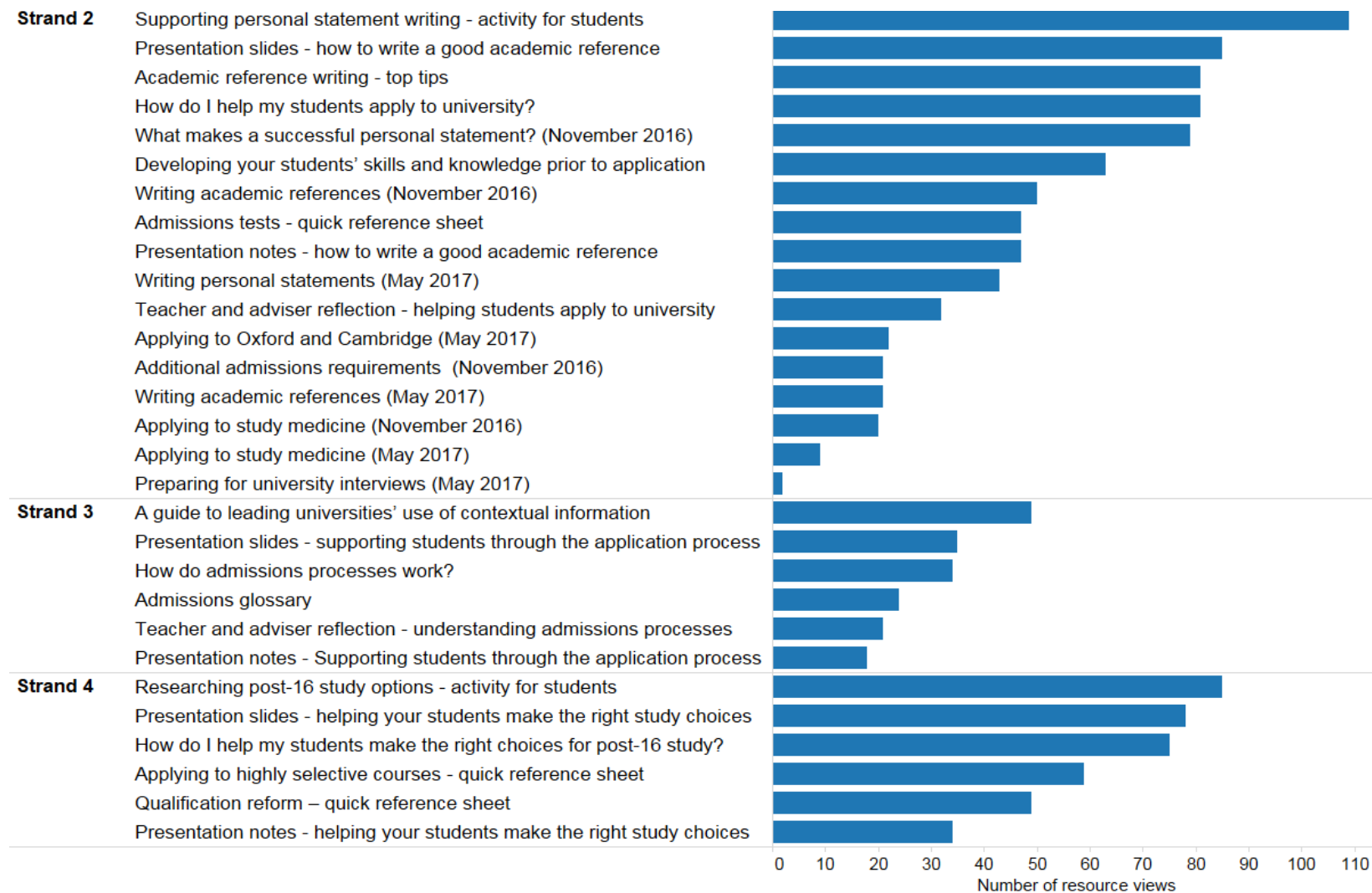


Figure 6 Number of resource views: Strands 2-4

The Registered Accounts dataset included a 'sign in count' field showing the number of times each account-holder had signed in. Figure 7 shows the distribution – we see that the majority of users (51%, N=436/859) sign in only once. 175 users (20%) sign in twice.

Number of sign-ins per user

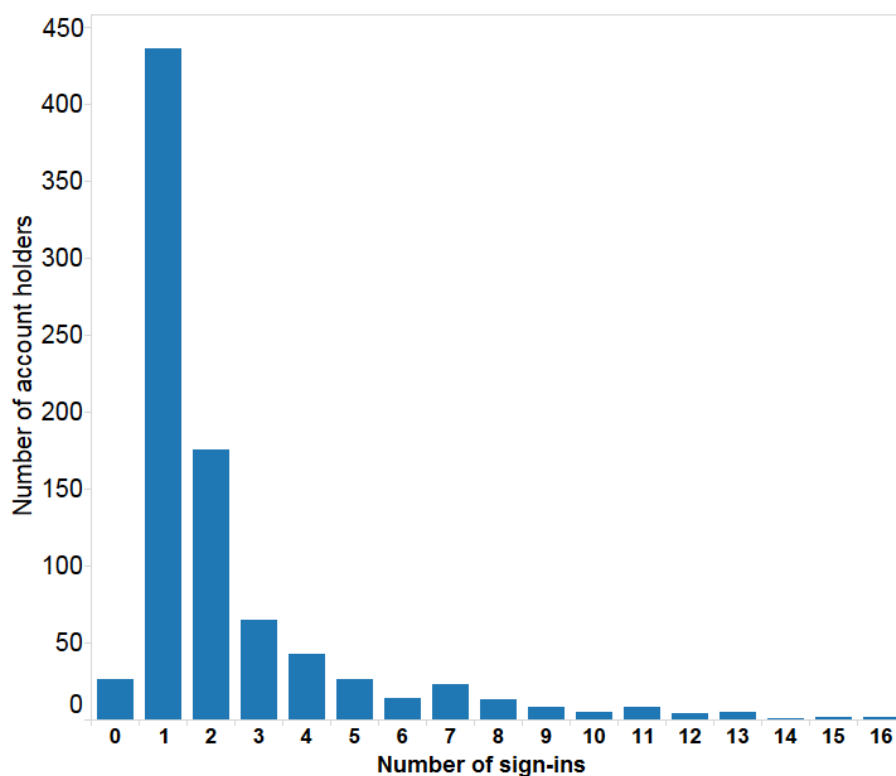


Figure 7 Frequency of number of sign-ins

By calculating the difference between the 'created at' and 'current sign in at' fields, it is possible to investigate the gap between first and most recent sign-in. Looking just at users who had signed in twice or more (N=397) we found that 26% of these users (N=104) had a 'sign in gap' of 0 days, i.e. both of the occasions that they signed in were on the same day. A further 8% of these users had a sign in gap of 1 day. However, many users have longer gaps between first and last sign-in. The maximum gap was 372 days (for a user who had signed in twice) and 132 users (33%) had a gap of 60 days or more.

It has not been possible in the scope of this report to investigate these patterns further. In particular, it would be desirable to look in more detail at the 'created at' data associated with each tracking event to develop understanding of patterns of use. To more fully understand the motivation of users, this data could be combined with information about Advancing Access email campaigns and other promotional activity, to track the impact that this has on engagement with the strands of resources and other areas of the website.

2.4 Contextual data

This section aims to investigate whether Advancing Access resources are reaching their intended audience. It describes the characteristics of the schools accessing Advancing Access resources, and compares them with schools nationally (in England).

The contextual data available for schools and colleges in Wales is more limited than England; information about users in Wales is addressed in a separate section.

The initial intention was to include contextual data for Scotland; however, as the Registered Users dataset showed that no state schools in Scotland were associated with an Advancing Access account, this was not pursued.

2.5 Methodology

The analysis in the following section of the report is based on a 'schools database' constructed for the purpose of undertaking this analysis. The starting point was an extract from Edubase, the Department for Education's (DfE) register of educational establishments in England and Wales. The register was cleaned to remove a range of irrelevant school types (e.g. pupil referral units, special schools) and matched with data from the DfE 'Find and compare schools in England' service, DfE destination statistics releases and HEFCE's POLAR3 secondary school area maps.

The cleaned list of registered accounts was then matched with this dataset to show how many accounts were associated with each school. Fuller details of the data sources and variables can be found in Appendix 1.

2.6 Schools in England

In total, Advancing Access accounts were associated with 414 state schools and colleges in England and Wales (397 in England), and 34 independent schools, details are shown in Table 4.

Type of Establishment	Number
Academy converter	167
Further education	71
Academy sponsor led	70
Community school	37
Other independent school	34
Welsh establishment	17
Foundation school	15
Voluntary aided school	15
Academy 16-19 converter	9
Free schools 16 to 19	4
Free schools	2
Sixth form centres	2
University technical college	2
Voluntary controlled school	2
City technology college	1
Total	448

Table 4 Establishment type (from Edubase) of schools associated with at least one Advancing Access account

In the analysis that follows, a range of data on these schools is presented from a range of sources. Not all data will be available for all schools – for example, 16-19 schools will not return data on GCSE performance or free school meals eligibility, and a school may have missing data if it has recently changed status (for example, converting to an academy). Therefore the total number of schools referred to in each section will differ, and the number of schools referred to on each occasion will be specified.

2.7 Opportunity areas

The Department for Education announced six 'opportunity areas' in October 2016 and a further six in January 2017. These local authority districts were selected for support on the basis of low social mobility and challenges in improving educational performance. Opportunity areas vary in size; some include many schools and some have very few. Table 5 shows the number of schools in each area, and the number that have at least one Advancing Access account. We see that overall, 13% of schools in opportunity areas have engaged with Advancing Access. The figure for schools not in

opportunity areas is 7%. In other words, schools in opportunity areas are around twice as likely to have an Advancing Access account than other schools.

Opportunity area	Number of secondary schools and colleges	Number and percentage engaged with Advancing Access
Blackpool	9	1 (11%)
Bradford	46	7 (15%)
Derby	19	4 (21%)
Doncaster	22	3 (14%)
Fenland and East Cambridgeshire	11	1 (9%)
Hastings	5	0 (0%)
Ipswich	11	0 (0%)
Norwich	16	2 (13%)
Oldham	19	2 (11%)
Scarborough	11	2 (18%)
Stoke-on-Trent	25	3 (12%)
West Somerset	3	0 (0%)
Total	197	25 (13%)

Table 5 Number of secondary schools and colleges in each opportunity area, and the number and percentage of schools in each area with at least one Advancing Access account

2.8 Progression to Higher Education

The percentage of students progressing to higher education from each school or college is investigated in three categories: progression to any higher education institution (HEI); progression to a 'top third' HEI⁴ and progression to a Russell Group HEI. We gathered variables for three years: 2016/17, 2015/16 and 2014/15. Due to the necessary time lag in the DfE gathering and preparing this data, the cohorts it refers to are those finishing KS5 in summer 2015, 2014 and 2013 – so while the data give an indication of the progression to higher education for students in these schools, they may not reflect the most recent picture and as such should be considered together with other contextual information and local knowledge.

Schools may have missing data in any of these three years due to a range of factors, for example if numbers are small and therefore the percentage has been suppressed to protect pupil anonymity, or if a school has newly opened or changed status (converted to an academy) during the production of the statistics.

To account for potential year-on-year fluctuation, we have also produced a three year average of progression rates in each category. To limit the amount of missing data in this average, we have included schools where data is available for only one or two of the three years (so for those with only one year of data available, the figure for that year is included as the 'average'). As fewer students are likely to progress to top third and Russell Group institutions than to any HEI, the level of suppressed data and therefore the number of schools with an average made up of only one or two years of data increases for these categories. However, for all three categories at least two thirds of the schools included in the average use data from all three years. Further detail on the statistical tests undertaken to evaluate the validity of this averaging method can be found in Appendix 1.

⁴ Based on the mean UCAS tariff score from the top three A level grades of entrants; list as published by the DfE.

Year	Institution Type	Category: Progression to...	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average progression for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average progression rate
2016/17	Schools	Any HEI	264	149 (56%)	115 (44%)	61%	60%
		Top third	252	98 (39%)	154 (61%)	25%	26%
		Russell Group	244	100 (41%)	144 (59%)	18%	17%
	Colleges	Any HEI	77	53 (69%)	24 (31%)	47%	41%
		Top third	76	40 (53%)	36 (47%)	14%	10%
		Russell Group	78	31 (40%)	47 (60%)	10%	7%
2015/16	Schools	Any HEI	242	140 (58%)	102 (42%)	59%	59%
		Top third	230	88 (38%)	142 (62%)	25%	25%
		Russell Group	219	88 (40%)	131 (60%)	18%	17%
	Colleges	Any HEI	66	45 (68%)	21 (32%)	46%	38%
		Top third	66	35 (53%)	31 (47%)	14%	10%
		Russell Group	70	31 (44%)	39 (56%)	9%	6%
2014/15	Schools	Any HEI	246	135 (55%)	111 (45%)	58%	58%
		Top third	231	86 (37%)	145 (63%)	25%	26%
		Russell	223	86 (39%)	137 (61%)	17%	17%
	Colleges	Any HEI	79	49 (62%)	30 (38%)	44%	39%
		Top third	78	39 (50%)	39 (50%)	13%	10%
		Russell Group	77	33 (43%)	44 (57%)	8%	6%

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for Higher Education destinations categories, for schools (defined in Edubase as 'Secondary' or 'All through') and colleges (defined in Edubase as '16 plus') with at least one AA account

Progression data is presented by the DfE with separate national averages for schools and colleges. Therefore we have grouped Advancing Access account holders into these categories and presented descriptive data to allow comparison against an accurate average. Table 6 shows how many schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account were above and below the national average on all three measures for the last three years.

For progression to any HEI, we see that the average for schools with an Advancing Access account is roughly similar to the national average each year. This is also the case for progression to top third and Russell Group institutions: the national average for schools with an Advancing Access account is not significantly different from the national average.

Looking at colleges we see that the average progression across all categories for colleges with an Advancing Access account is higher than the national average. The reasons for this are illuminated by comparing the distribution of HE progression for schools and colleges. Figure 8 shows the distribution of progression to any HEI (3 year average) for schools with an Advancing Access account compared to schools without, and Figure 9 shows the same information for colleges. We see that for schools, the distributions are broadly similar, indicating that schools signing up for an Advancing Access account are representative of the general population of schools in this respect. However, for colleges we see that while the distribution for progression to HE peaks around 25%, colleges with progression around 50% are more likely to have Advancing Access accounts.

Progression to HE from schools

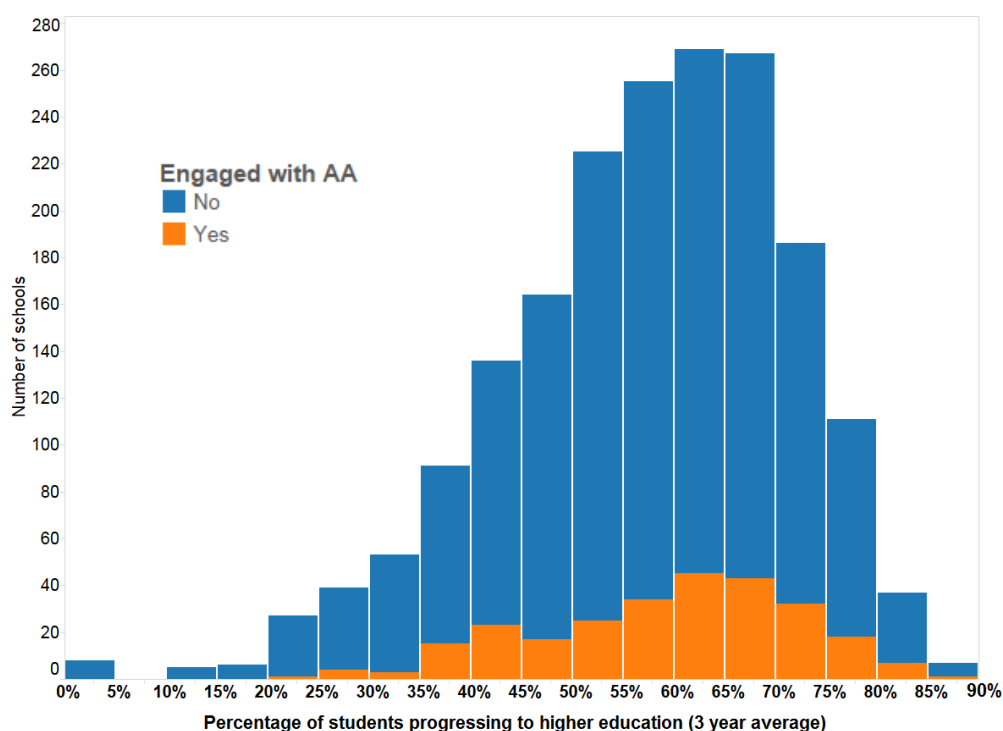


Figure 8 Histogram showing distribution of % of pupils progressing to any HEI, 3 year average; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an account.

Progression to HE from colleges

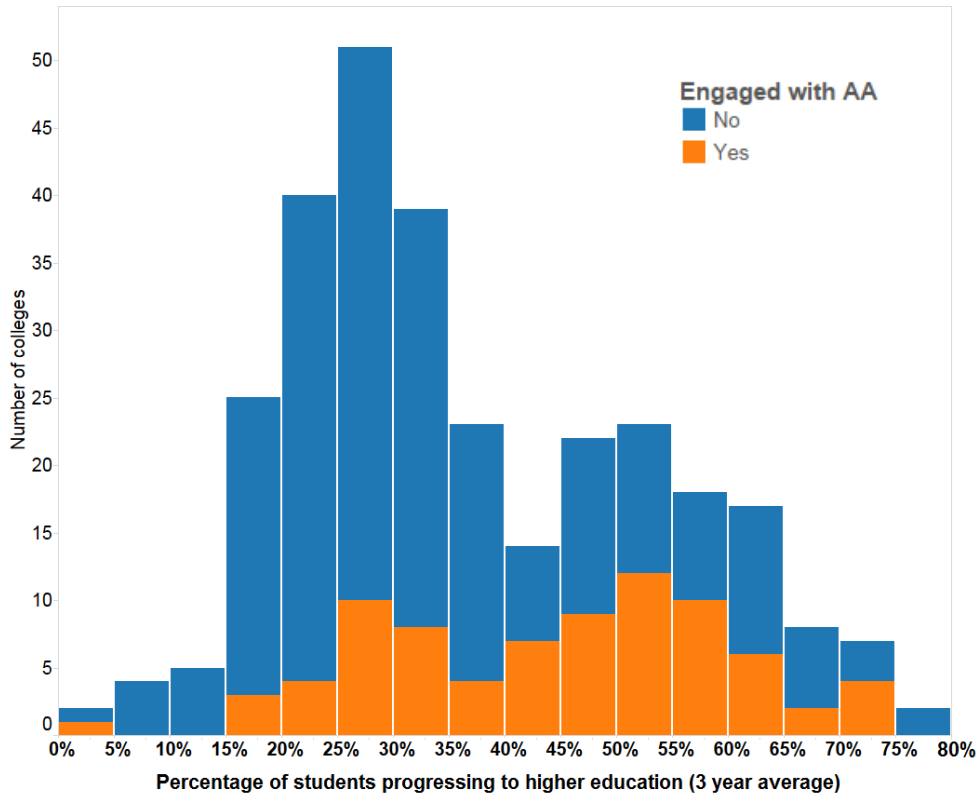


Figure 9 Histogram showing distribution of % of pupils progressing to any HEI, 3 year average; colleges without an AA account compared to colleges with an account.

When looking at progression to Russell Group institutions (3 year average) we see in Figure 10 that the distribution for schools with Advancing Access accounts is similar to the national distribution. The distribution for colleges (shown in Figure 11) is somewhat similar, although a larger share of schools at the top end of the distribution have Advancing Access accounts than at the lower end (i.e. those with higher progression to Russell Group institutions are more likely to have an Advancing Access account). It must be noted that the actual number of colleges with relatively high progression to Russell Group institutions is small and so changes in behaviour from a small number of colleges can have a large impact on these statistics.

Progression to Russell Group universities from schools

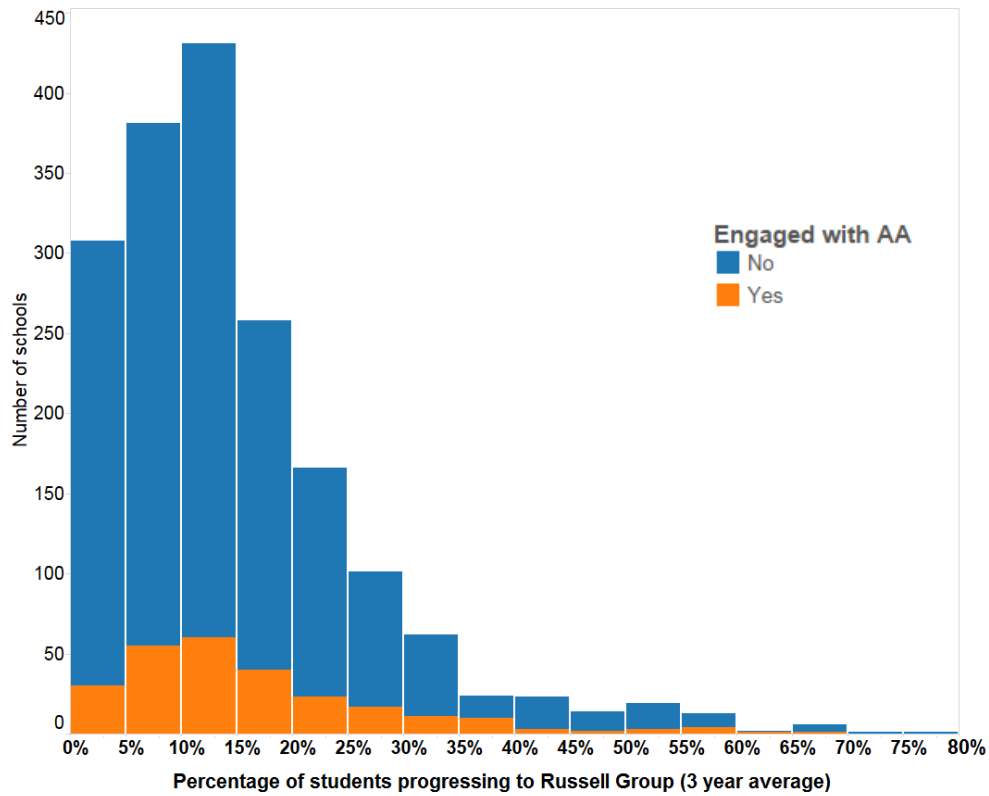


Figure 10 Histogram showing distribution of % of pupils progressing to Russell Group institutions, 3 year average; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an account

Progression to Russell Group universities from colleges

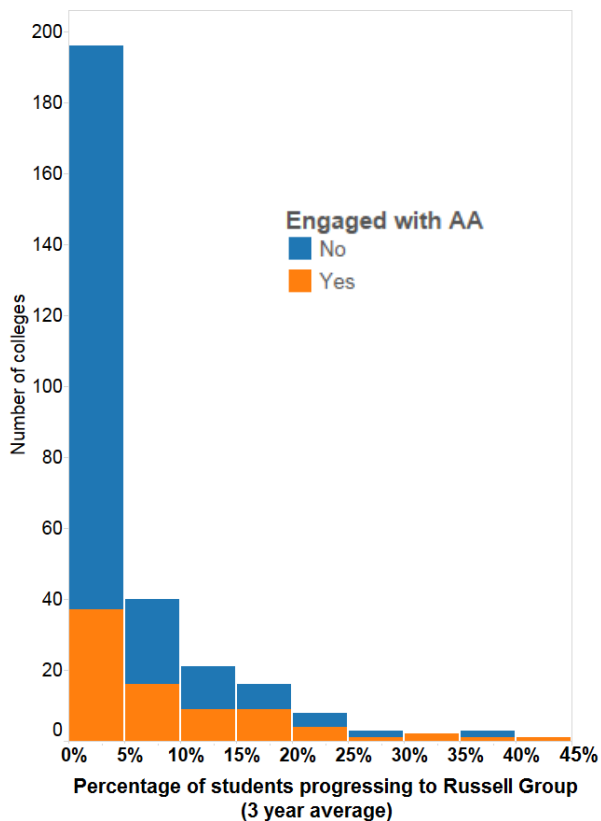


Figure 11 Histogram showing distribution of % of pupils progressing to Russell Group institutions, 3 year average; colleges without an AA account compared to colleges with an account.

2.9 Attainment (KS5)

To assess attainment at KS5 we looked at three categories: percentage of A level students achieving at least three levels at grades AAB or better, at least two of which are in facilitating subjects; average point score in best 3 A level entries; and average point score per academic entry. The first two categories are likely to be higher, on average, for schools than colleges, whereas looking at point scores per academic entry will also identify colleges where students perform highly in other qualifications (although it may also be affected by counting every entry rather than the best three, so the two measures should not be directly compared).

We see in Table 7 that on average, schools and colleges that have an Advancing Access account have slightly lower levels of attainment than the national average. The box plots in Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14 give further context (note that all figures exclude independent schools and Welsh establishments). We see that for the majority of schools (whether or not they have an Advancing Access account), their attainment on these measures is below the national average. For all three measures, the mean average is skewed by a relatively small number of schools scoring very highly – so any school picked at random would be more likely to be below the national average than above it. This means that comparison against the national average is not the most useful metric for assessing targeting in relation to KS5 attainment.

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% 3 A levels at AAB incl. 2 facilitating	325	114 (35%)	211 (65%)	12.0%	13.9%
Average point score in best 3 A levels	325	130 (40%)	195 (60%)	32.19	33.8
Average point score per entry	343	132 (38%)	211 (62%)	28.69	30.6

Table 7 Descriptive statistics for KS5 attainment categories, for schools and colleges with at least one AA account

Comparing the distribution of schools with an Advancing Access account with those without an account (Figure 12), we see that in general the percentage of pupils achieving AAB including two facilitating subjects at A level is a higher, but not substantially so.

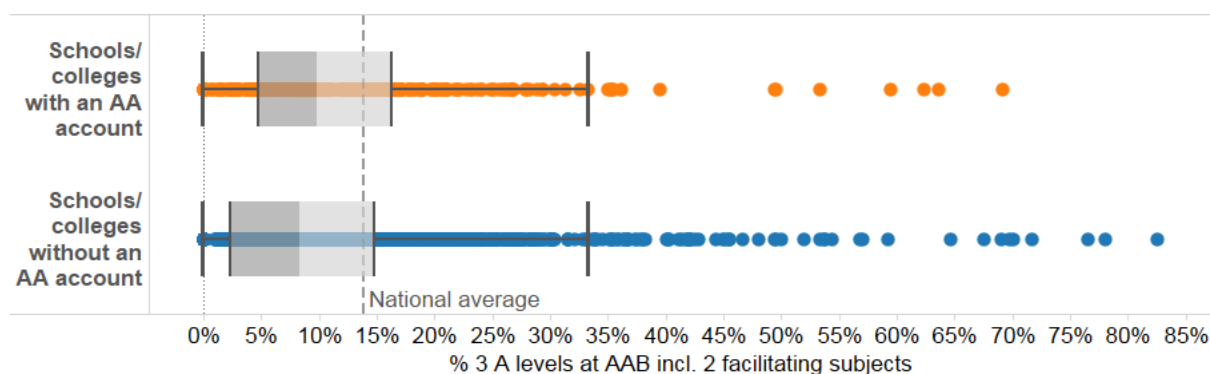


Figure 12 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils achieving AAB or higher in at least two facilitating subjects at A level; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 2%, median = 8%, upper quartile = 15%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 5%, median = 10%, upper quartile = 16%.

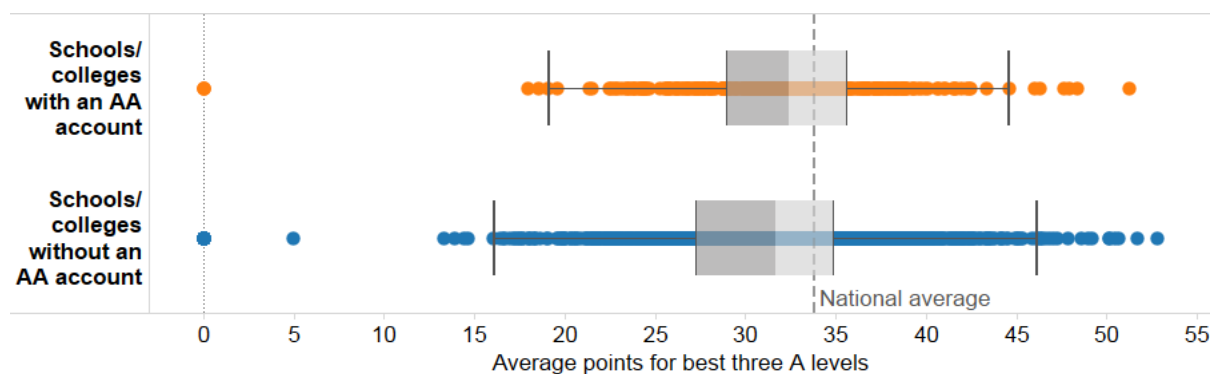


Figure 13 Box and whisker plot showing the average points score for pupils' best 3 A levels; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 27.3, median = 31.7%, upper quartile = 34.9. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 29.0, median = 32.4, upper quartile = 35.7.

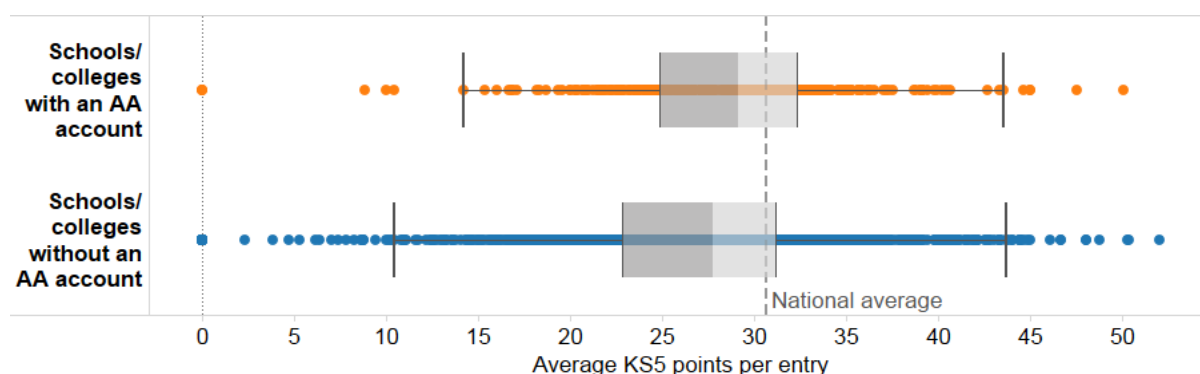


Figure 14 Box and whisker plot showing the average KS5 points score per entry; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 22.9, median = 27.7, upper quartile = 31.2. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 24.9, median = 29.1, upper quartile = 32.4.

2.10 Attainment (KS4)

To measure attainment at KS4 we used the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics at GCSE. Here we report the measure for 2016; measures for 2015 and 2014 are also included in the contextual dataset provided to Advancing Access. Note that while most of the institutions included in this measure are schools, there are a small number of colleges that also enter students for GCSEs and are therefore also included. We see in Table 8 below that on average, schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account have slightly higher GCSE attainment than the national average.

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% pupils achieving 5+ A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics GCSE	293	175 (60%)	118 (40%)	61.0%	57.4%
Progress 8 score	291	176 (60%)	115 (40%)	0.025	-0.03

Table 8 Descriptive statistics for KS4 attainment, for schools and colleges with at least one AA account

We see in Figure 15 that in general, schools with an Advancing Access account have slightly higher attainment at GCSE than schools without.

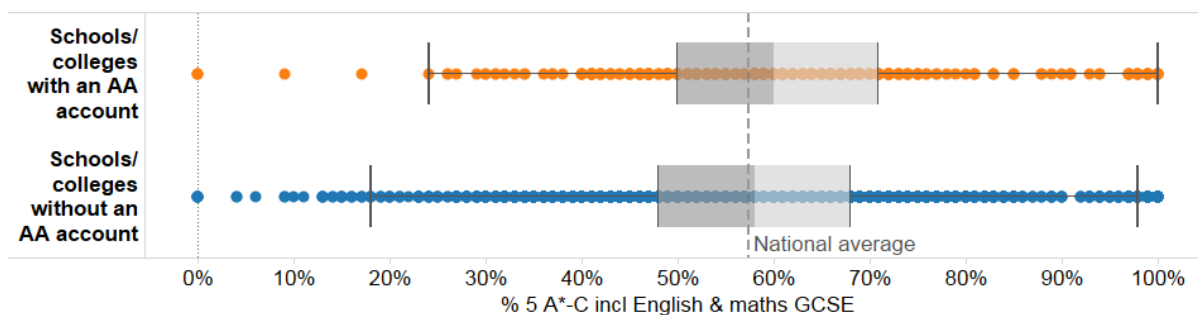


Figure 15 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils achieving at least 5 A*-C or equivalent including English and maths at GCSE; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 48%, median = 58%, upper quartile = 68%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 50%, median = 60%, upper quartile = 71%.

2.11 Free School Meals eligibility

Data on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in each school, and the percentage eligible at any time during the past 6 years (known as 'Ever6') was gathered from the schools census published by the DfE. National averages were also taken from this census. Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics for both categories for schools with at least one Advancing Access account. We see that the average for these schools is a little below the national average in both categories.

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals	302	102 (34%)	200 (66%)	13.7%	14.6%
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM at any time during the past 6 years	300	110 (37%)	190 (63%)	27.7%	29.3%

Table 9 Descriptive statistics for free school meals eligibility, for schools and colleges with at least one AA account

Figure 16 shows the distribution of free school meals eligibility for schools with at least one Advancing Access account compared to schools without, and Figure 17 the same information for Ever6 eligibility. As with other measures, the distribution for schools with an Advancing Access account is a little below the distribution for other schools, but has a similar spread.

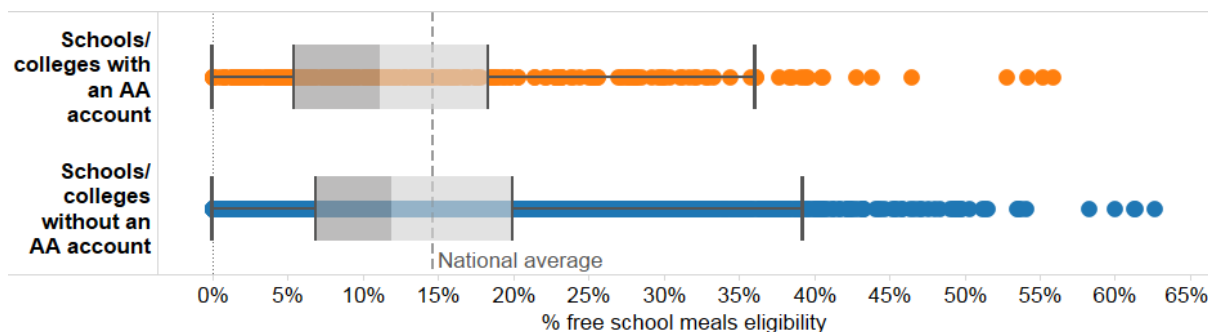


Figure 16 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils eligible for free school meals; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 7%, median = 7%

12%, upper quartile = 20%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 5%, median = 11%, upper quartile = 18%.

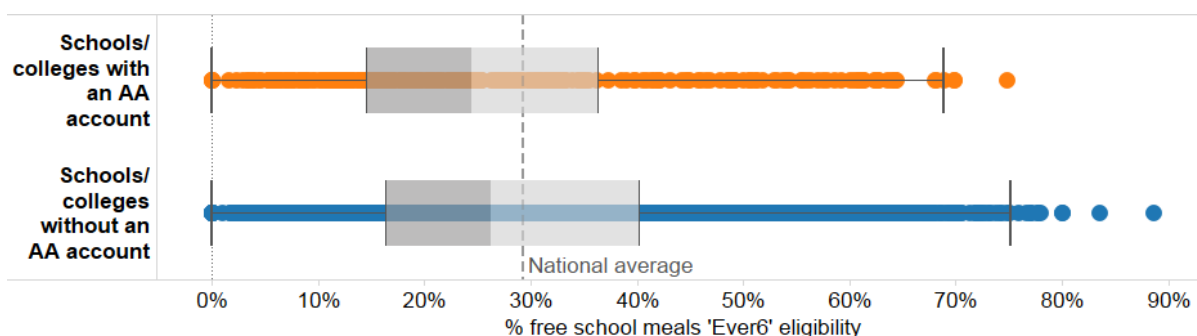


Figure 17 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils eligible for free school meals at any time in the last 6 years; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 17%, median = 26%, upper quartile = 40%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 5%, median = 11%, upper quartile = 20%.

2.12 POLAR3 and gaps in young participation

The POLAR3 (Participation Of Local AREas, 3rd version) classification, developed by HEFCE (2012), measures the rate of participation in higher education at census area statistic ward level. It is commonly used by government, HEIs and others to target widening participation interventions. Each ward is ranked by the proportion of young people progressing to HE and allocated a quintile on this basis. Quintile 1 represents the lowest levels of participation, with quintile 5 representing the highest.

The original POLAR3 classification is now accompanied by a 'gaps in young participation' classification. The 'gaps' classification ranks wards by the proportion of young people progressing to HE given the level of KS4 attainment and ethnicity of pupils in that area. The gaps classification illustrates whether participation is lower or higher than expected given these factors (whereas POLAR3 simply illustrates whether it is low or high in relation to other areas).

As POLAR3 is based on geographical location, it has been appropriate for conducting evaluation or targeting interventions at pupil level (and this continues to be appropriate for many interventions that are targeted at individual pupils). As Advancing Access is targeted at schools, it is desirable to look at school-level POLAR3 quintiles. This has previously been achieved by using the school postcode as a proxy for the postcode of pupils attending that school. However, in reality pupils will usually be drawn from several wards around a school, with a range of POLAR3 quintiles. HEFCE have recently published secondary school area maps, showing the percentage of pupils in each secondary school coming from each surrounding ward, and the POLAR3 and gaps quintile these wards. Using HEFCE's dataset (HEFCE, 2016), we calculated the percentage of pupils from each school in the dataset living in each POLAR3 and gaps quintile and matched this into the schools database, to give a POLAR3 measure more suitable for evaluating Advancing Access.

To allow for straightforward comparison, here we use the percentage of pupils in each school living in quintile 1 and 2 as a single outcome on both measures. The contextual dataset provided to Advancing Access includes the breakdown for each quintile for all schools in England.

The nature of POLAR3 data means that 40% of census area wards are in quintile 1 or 2. This does not necessarily mean that the average percentage of pupils residing in these wards will be 40% for all schools; for the schools matched in our database, we see an average of 41% of pupils in schools living in quintile 1 or 2 for both categories. Table 10 below shows the descriptive statistics for each category – note that due to rounding of the original data for each ward, totals for some schools come to over 100%. We see that the average on both categories for schools with at least one Advancing Access account is below the national average.

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage
% pupils living in a POLAR3 young progression quintile 1 or 2 ward	298	121 (41%)	177 (59%)	35%	41.0%
% pupils living in a POLAR3 'gaps' quintile 1 or 2 ward	298	126 (42%)	172 (58%)	37%	40.6%

Table 10 Descriptive statistics for POLAR3 quintile 1 and 2, for schools and colleges with at least one AA account

Figure 18 and Figure 19 show the distribution of each category for all schools (excluding independent schools and Welsh establishments). We see that in both figures the distribution for schools with an Advancing Access account sits a little below that for other schools.

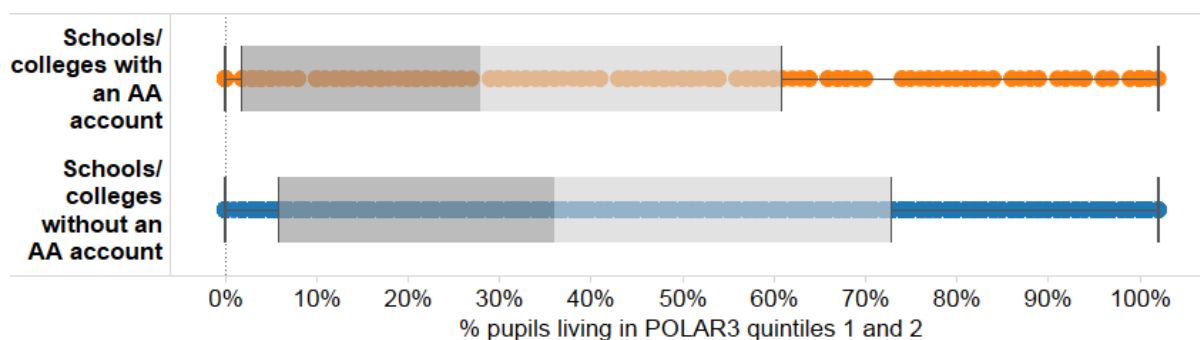


Figure 18 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils living in POLAR3 quintile 1 or 2; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 6%, median = 36%, upper quartile = 73%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 2%, median = 28%, upper quartile = 61%.

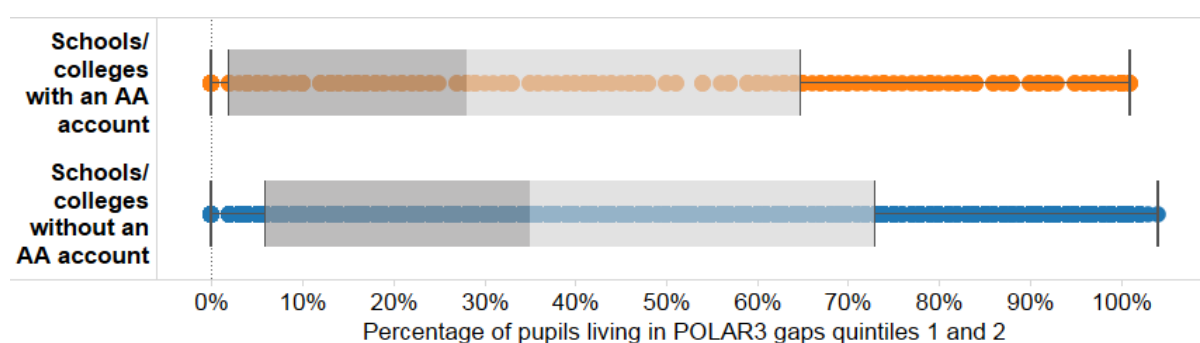


Figure 19 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils living in POLAR3 gaps quintile 1 or 2; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 6%, median = 35%, upper quartile = 73%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 2%, median = 28%, upper quartile = 65%.

2.13 Schools and colleges in Wales

Data on all schools and colleges in Wales is not publicly available in the same way as for schools in England. The 'My Local School' service for Wales publishes contextual data that is searchable by individual schools, but it is not possible to download the underlying dataset to compare with other schools in Wales. There is no data published on colleges in Wales.

From the Registered accounts dataset, seventeen educational establishments in Wales were identified (4% of the total number of schools in Wales); given this small number, we have focused on gathering contextual data on these schools but have not pursued the Welsh government or HEIs for additional data on all schools and colleges in Wales.

Fourteen of the 17 Welsh establishments were matched in the My Local School service. The three establishments that could not be matched appear to be colleges.

For the schools in Wales with at least one Advancing Access account, Figure 20 shows the percentage of pupils in each school of statutory school age known to be eligible for free school meals. We see that five of the schools have a percentage above the national average.

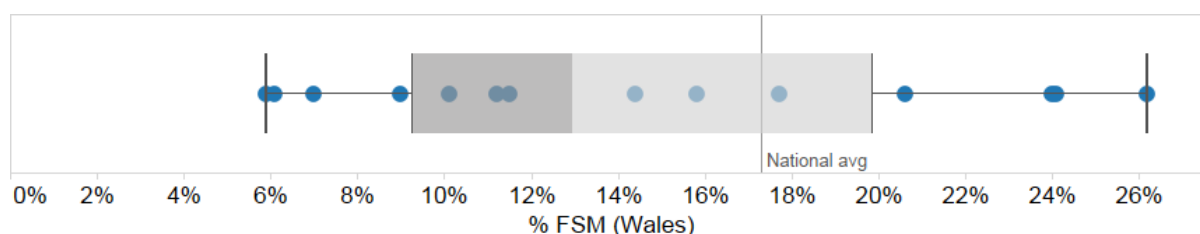


Figure 20 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals; schools in Wales with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as provided by 'My Local School' service. Lower quartile = 9.3%, median = 13.0%, upper quartile = 19.9%

We used two measures to investigate academic performance at KS4: the percentage of pupils who have achieved the Level 2 threshold, which is a volume of qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSEs at Grade A*-C including one in English or Welsh first language and one in Mathematics; and the average capped wider points score for each school, calculated using the best eight results from all qualifications approved for pre-16 use in Wales for each pupil.

Figure 21 shows the percentage of pupils in each school meeting the level 2 threshold. Twelve of the 14 schools with an Advancing Access account are above the national average on this measure. However, it is not clear from the data available how the national mean average relates to the distribution of scores for schools in Wales, so it is not possible to test the relationship between the pattern for these schools compared with schools across Wales.

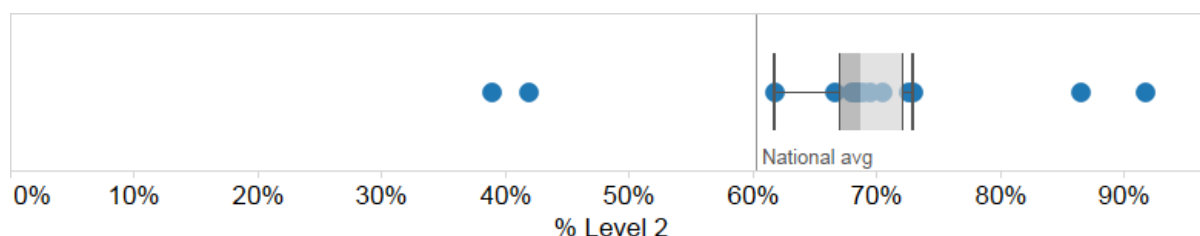


Figure 21 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils meeting the level 2 threshold; schools in Wales with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as provided by 'My Local School' service. Lower quartile = 67.1%, median = 68.7%, upper quartile = 72.2%

Figure 22 shows the distribution of average points scores at KS4. Again twelve of the fourteen schools with an Advancing Access account have attainment above the national average, but as above it is not possible to say how this relates to national patterns of attainment.

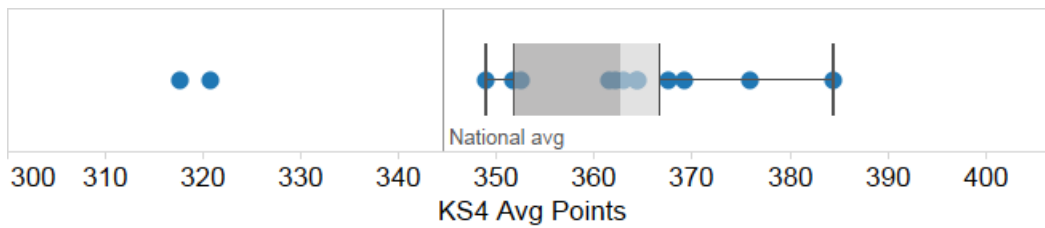


Figure 22 Box and whisker plot showing average points score at KS4; schools in Wales with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as provided by 'My Local School' service. Lower quartile = 350, median = 363, upper quartile = 367

To investigate attainment in school at sixth form level, we also used two measures of attainment: the percentage of pupils who have achieved the Level 3 threshold (a volume of qualifications equivalent to 2 A levels grades A-E); and the average wider points score for 17-year-olds, which includes all qualifications approved for pre-18 use in Wales.

We see a similar picture to that for KS4 attainment for schools with at least one Advancing Access account. Figure 23 and Figure 24 each show eleven of the fourteen schools with scores above the national average. As above, it is not possible to say whether this is reflective of national patterns.

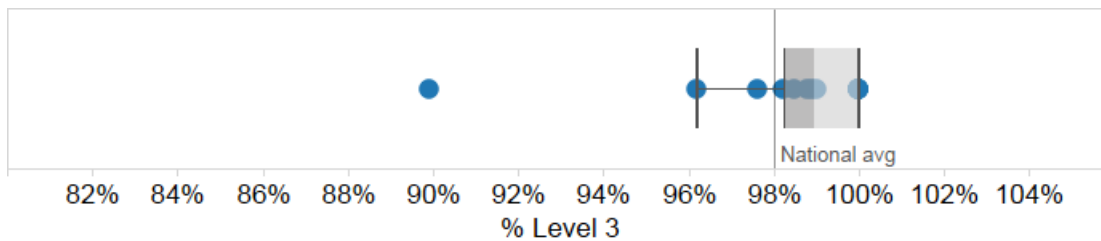


Figure 23 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils meeting the level 3 threshold; schools in Wales with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as provided by 'My Local School' service. Lower quartile = 98.3%, median = 99.0%, upper quartile = 100.0%

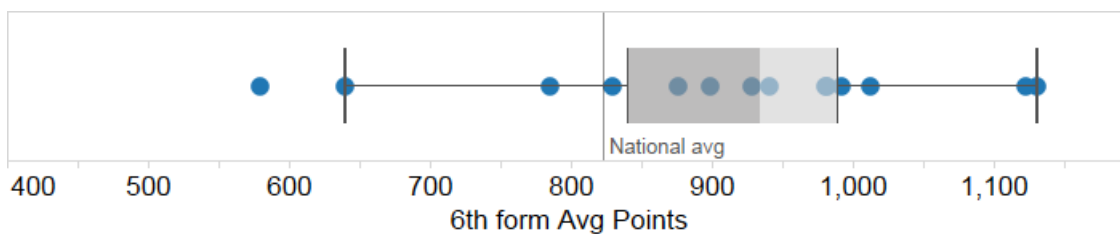


Figure 24 Box and whisker plot showing average points score at sixth form; schools in Wales with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as provided by 'My Local School' service. Lower quartile = 841, median = 934, upper quartile = 990

3. Survey and interviews of website users

A survey was conducted of all users who had registered an account on the Advancing Access website since the initial launch, up to 30 August 2017. Users were sent email invitations to complete the survey. Long-term users who had opened an account before the launch of additional strands in May 2017 received emails alerting them to the new resources and advised them to look at them before completing the survey. New users (since the relaunch) received a standard email and some users from specific organisations received a tailored email highlighting that we were interested in responses from all users, not just those based in schools or colleges. Multiple reminders were sent to those who had not completed the survey.

To encourage increased response rates part-way through the survey, period links to the survey were added to each strand page on the Advancing Access website; a prize draw incentive was introduced and the survey was promoted on social media accounts. The survey was amended during the survey period to allow a shortened route through the survey for respondents not associated with a single school (e.g. independent careers advisers and third sector organisations) and users were informed of this by email.

Four interviews with Advancing Access users were conducted between June and October 2017, and these are analysed alongside two interviews that were conducted in January 2017.

3.1 Background of respondents

There were 76 valid responses to the survey. Not all respondents answered every question, so totals will vary throughout the analysis.

74 respondents identified a particular school that they were associated with. The two respondents who did not do this were both independent careers advisers.

Respondents were asked to select their role and responses, shown in Table 11 below. Of those selecting 'Other', three were head of Year 12 or 13; three were academic advisers or variations on this title, and three were university application coordinators. Others had pastoral advice roles or were involved in particular strands of applications. Some respondents, who had picked roles such as teacher or head of subject, gave additional details, and had additional responsibilities for careers guidance, gifted and talented coordination or subject teaching along with their school leadership responsibilities.

Role	Number	Percentage
Careers Adviser	24	32%
Other	16	21%
Head of Sixth Form	13	17%
Teacher	9	12%
Head of Subject (or equivalent)	7	9%
Assistant Head of Sixth Form	5	7%
Deputy Head	1	1%
Total	75	

Table 11 Number and percentage of responses to 'What is your role in school/college?'

Respondents were also asked how long they had been working in schools, and the responses ranged from 1-46 years, with an average of 16 years. When asked how long they had been working in their current school or college, the average was 10 years. Out of those who responded regarding whether they had been a student ambassador or student mentor while at university, 20% (N=15) had done so.

3.2 Background of schools

The majority of respondents selected the post-16 (including 11-18) stage of education as best characterising the school/college they worked in, with 9% (N=7) of those who responded to this

question saying they worked with the 11-16 range. When those working in 11-16 schools were asked about the post-16 destinations of their students, five selected A-levels, one selected career-focused qualifications such as BTEC or NVQ and one selected 'other' providing the response 'a mixture of all the above'.

For those who selected post-16 (including 11-18) as best characterising their school/college, the majority of those who responded regarding the post-18 destinations of their students selected 'University' (85%, N=55).

Post-16 respondents were also asked, 'If students from your school / college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?', and could select the main three universities from three drop down lists. There were 173 selections in total, of which 72 (42%) were Russell Group institutions. The data on progression to Russell group universities provided by survey respondents was in line with HESA data. The selections were combined for analysis and the universities selected more than three times, are shown in Table 12. Table 13 shows all Russell Group universities selected. The full set of responses can be found in Appendix 2.

The universities that were selected as typical destinations for their pupils tended to be closer to the school rather than further away except in the case of Russell Group universities.

Institution	N
Newcastle University	10
Northumbria University Newcastle	9
University of Liverpool	8
Cardiff University (Prifysgol Caerdydd)	6
Sheffield Hallam University	6
University of Nottingham	6
University of Sunderland	6
Manchester Metropolitan University	5
University of Bristol	5
University of Lincoln	5
University of Manchester	5
Durham University	4
University of Leeds	4
University of Portsmouth	4
University of Sheffield	4
University of Southampton	4
City University London	3
Nottingham Trent University	3
Teesside University	3
University of Exeter	3
University of Greenwich	3
University of Huddersfield	3

Table 12 Responses to 'If students from your school/college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?'; institutions selected three times or more

Institution	N
Newcastle University	10
University of Liverpool	8
Cardiff University (Prifysgol Caerdydd)	6
University of Nottingham	6
University of Bristol	5
University of Manchester	5
Durham University	4
University of Leeds	4
University of Sheffield	4
University of Southampton	4
University of Exeter	3
Queen Mary, University of London	2
University of Birmingham	2
University of Cambridge	2
University of Warwick	2
Queen's University Belfast	1
University of Edinburgh, The	1
University of Glasgow	1
University of Oxford	1
University of York	1

Table 13 Responses to 'If students from your school/college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?'; all Russell Group institutions selected

3.3 Advancing Access resources

When asked how the Advancing Access resources are best characterised, respondents were most likely to perceive them as 'information and resources to develop my own knowledge', with 98% (n= 55) of respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing with this (Figure 25). 'Information and resources to use in sessions with my students' was agreed with in almost the same frequency (n = 54 96% agreement) and respondents were more likely to strongly agree with this statement.

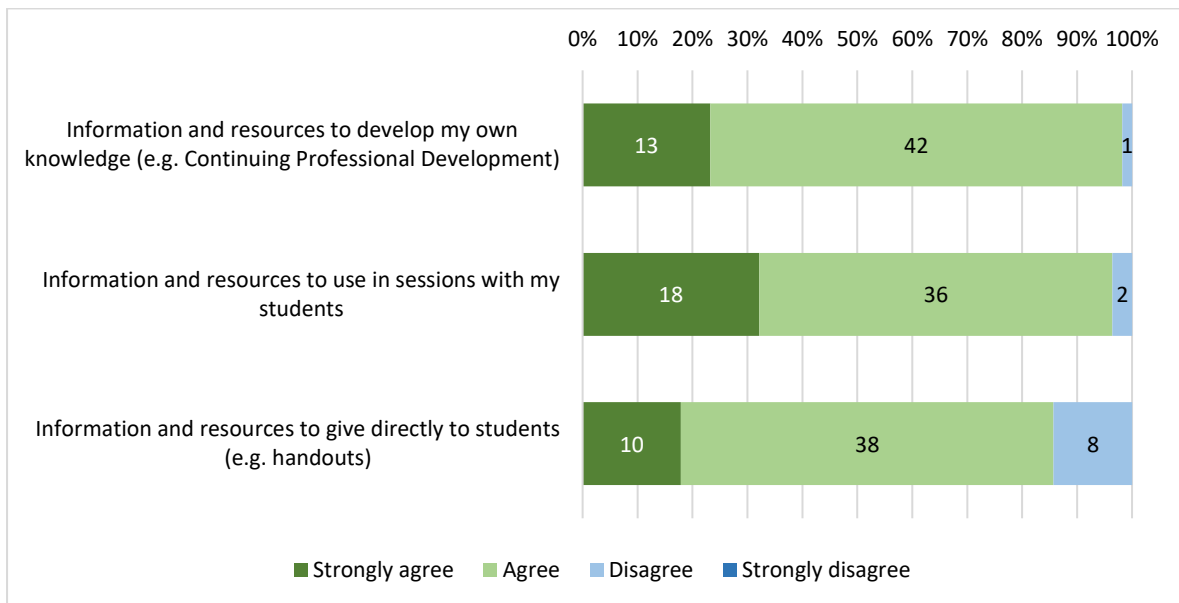


Figure 25 Responses to 'The information and resources on the Advancing Access website are best characterised as:'

Figure 26 shows responses to questions about the quality of Advancing Access resources. 100% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the resources were useful, up to date and accurate. Although average respondents had lots of experience, 76% still believed they found information they didn't know before.

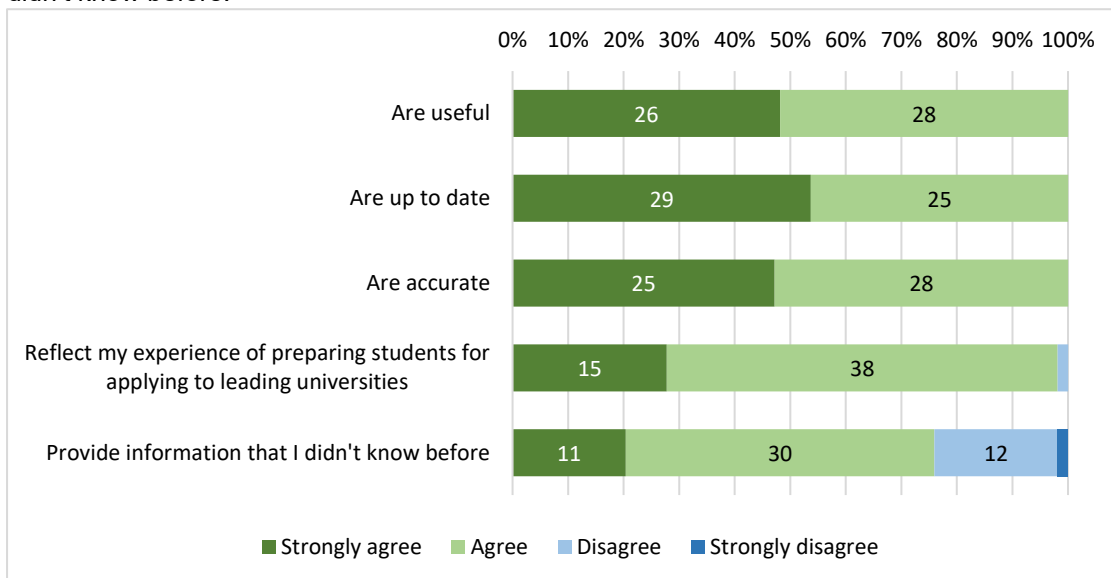


Figure 26 Responses to 'Please show how much you agree with the following statements about the Advancing Access website: The information and resources...'

Participants were asked how far they agreed that Advancing Access had improved their ability to support students in a range of areas, and their responses can be seen in Figure 27. Respondents were most likely to agree that Advancing Access had helped them support students with the admissions processes at each university and how the application is dealt with (87%, n= 47) and how to access the most competitive universities or courses (87% ,n=47).

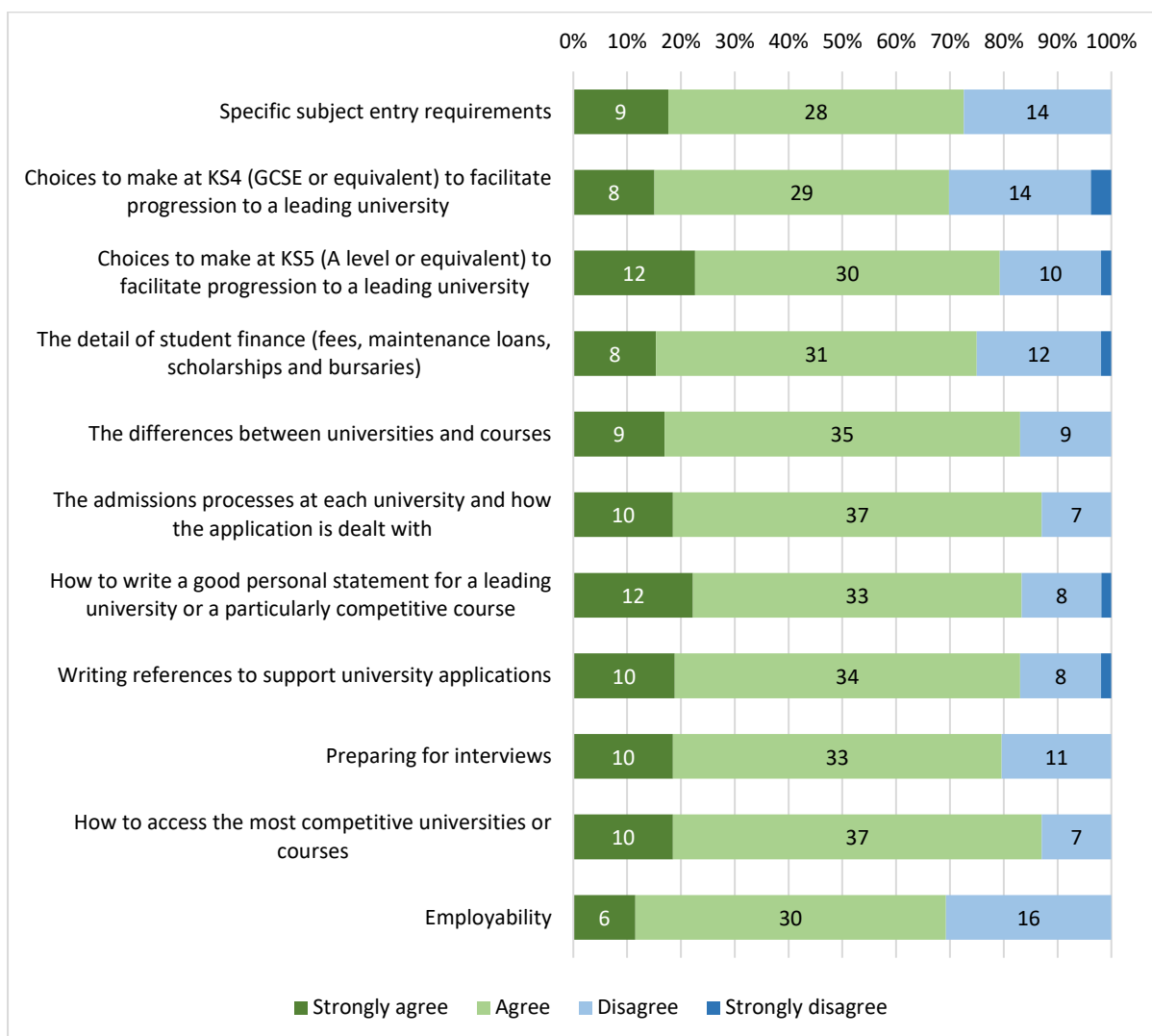


Figure 27 Responses to 'Please show how much you agree with the following statements about the Advancing Access website: The Advancing Access website has improved my ability to support students with...'

When asked about the likelihood of changing the advice they give to students as a result of engaging with the Advancing Access website (Figure 28), 30% of respondents said that they were more likely to advise their students to apply to leading universities such as those in the Russell Group and 22% said that they were more likely to encourage more of their students to consider university.

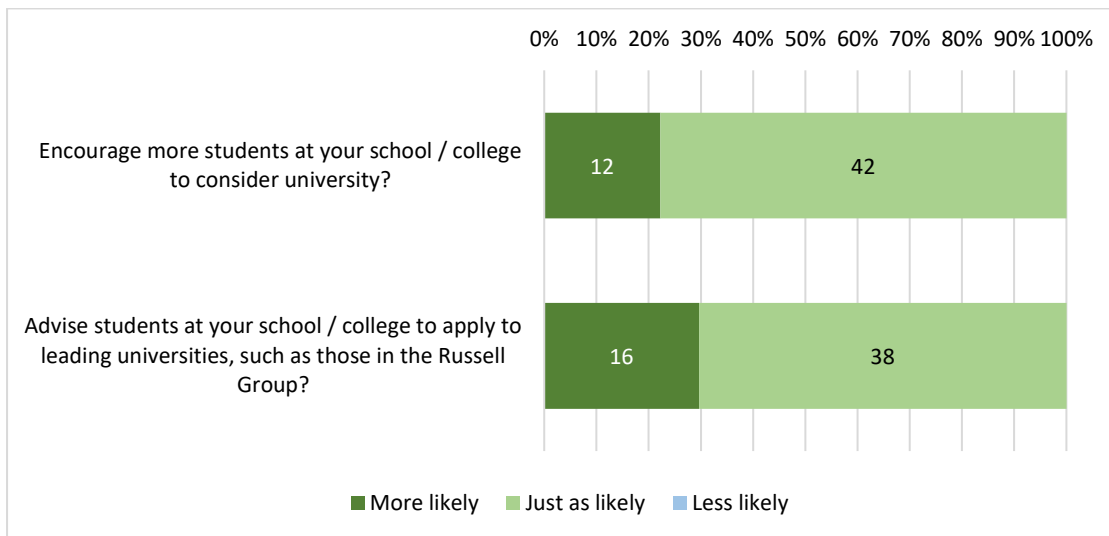


Figure 28 Responses to: 'As a result of engaging with the information and resources available on the Advancing Access website, how likely are you now to...'

3.3.1 Strands of information

The next stage of the survey included four screening questions, one for each strand of resources. For each strand, respondents were asked to choose whether they had used the resources; looked at the resources but not yet used them; or hadn't looked at this strand. If they hadn't looked at the strand, they were directed on to the next screening question and after strand 4, to the final questions in the survey. Those that had used the strand were asked about how they had used each resource, and those that had looked at it but not yet used it were asked how they planned to use each resource.

Figure 29 shows how many respondents had used each strand. Less than 20% of respondents had used each strand, so where participants were able to respond on the individual strands this was mostly about how they intended to use them rather than how they had been used.

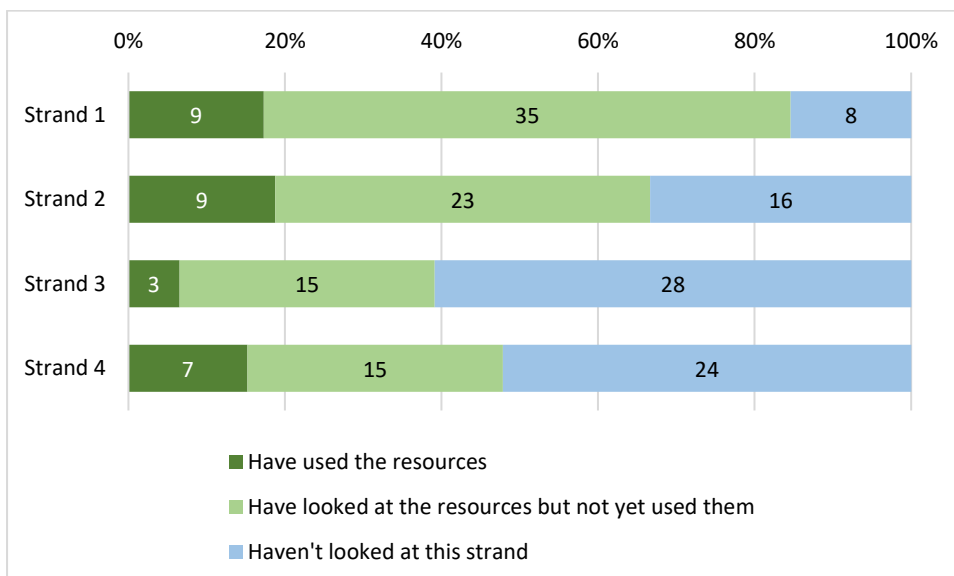


Figure 29 Responses to 'How have you engaged with the resources in Strand x: [strand name]?'

3.3.2 Barriers to use

Participants were asked to choose from a range of factors which was most likely to prevent them from using Advancing Access resources, and which factors were likely to limit the impact of the resources. The most frequent response on both preventing use and limiting impact was 'not enough time', with 42% (N=19) and 43% (N=20) respondents selecting this, respectively. 'None' was the second most frequent response to both questions (40%, N=18 and 37%, N=17). All other responses were selected by 3 or fewer participants. Three respondents gave a free-text answer; these all mentioned competing resources, for example, "there are a lot of resources out there and there is almost too much choice - we can't use all of them!"

3.4 Perceptions and audience of Advancing Access

There are two main types of users for Advancing Access. Interviewees and most survey respondents tended to exemplify the first type of user: supporting students career and/or HE decisions forms a large part of their role, and as such Advancing Access is one of many sources of information informing their expertise. Interviewees all had substantial responsibility for progression to HE in their setting – roles included school career advisers, a head of sixth form and 'university officer'. They used Advancing Access resources on the sessions they themselves were delivering to students – both one-to-one and workshop-style sessions. They tended to perceive the resources as an additional source of information to weave into their knowledge and resources from other sources. Advancing Access was one of a range of sources of information that they would use to ensure that their knowledge was current.

The second main type of user is the 'occasional adviser'. These are teachers and others who do not have careers advice or progression to HE as the main part of their role, but are likely to be in contact with students making these decisions as a form tutor or subject teacher. These users could engage with Advancing Access indirectly, for example attending a training session in school delivered using Advancing Access materials. We might expect the number of these type of users accessing the website directly to increase as usage spreads through word of mouth.

The university application process that interviewees described tended to involve input from a range of staff, and interviewees had an appreciation that all teachers had the potential to influence students' HE decision-making. One interviewee was intending to use Advancing Access resources in training sessions on UCAS references and personal statements. Another interviewee felt that the most important feature of Advancing Access for 'occasional advisers' was the opportunity it gave to challenge their misconceptions and update their understanding. They had directed teachers to the resources:

"Sometimes they can make off the cuff remarks to students and that stays with them for a long, long time. "I don't think they will take you at [RG institution]!" ... with no justification for it. I am trying to push that with the staff [so they can] see now what they are, what they are looking for, entry requirements those universities are looking for - they don't look at where that student is coming from. It's whether they meet the requirements for the university [that influences] whether they will be considered."

Interview respondent, careers adviser in a single state school

The interviewee felt that the Advancing Access resources represented Russell Group universities as they understood them to be now, compared with "20 years" ago when they felt that their language and approach was more "elitist". The resources allowed her to more easily convey this change to colleagues.

Most interviewees did see Advancing Access as distinct from other content – all interviewees were aware that it was delivered by the Russell Group without being prompted. One interviewee said that although they recognised it as representing the Russell Group, they would not describe it like this to their colleagues; rather, the interviewee would describe it as a general university advice website in the hope that it would then challenge colleagues' expectations about whether their students were suitable

for leading universities. When asked how they felt it was different from other resources, one interviewee felt that it was more targeted at advisers (rather than teachers) and had more detail than most other sites they used.

However, one interviewee and some survey respondents saw the Advancing Access content as more 'generic', pertaining to university access in general rather than specifically leading universities. In some cases, this was because students didn't perceive most Russell Group universities as different from other universities – the idea of simply going to any university was perceived in the same way. In this case, the interviewee was intending to use the resources, for example to support all teachers involved with writing references, but expected that few students in the school would actually attend Russell Group institutions:

"To be honest, yes it would be great if they went to Russell Group universities, but a lot of our students don't even aspire to university, and I've got to work on those students as well to let them see that yes, there is life outside of [their town] and you can go."

Interview respondent, school sixth form

In both the survey and the interviews there were occasions where Advancing Access was compared with the UCAS website. In general, both websites were seen as accessible sources of reliable information and resources.

"I have only used your website to access the "how to write a reference" because we have several new personal tutors and it seemed silly to re-invent the wheel when the information was there. However, I could just as easily have used the UCAS information."

Advancing Access user survey respondent

At the time of data collection (June to October 2017) interviewees had not had the opportunity to use many of the resources in practice – rather, they were intending to review their set of materials and look for gaps where the resources could be incorporated. This quote from a survey respondent characterises this position:

"It really is a matter of looking at them more thoroughly and building them into our support. We have a lot of materials already developed to suit our own requirements as exactly as possible, so these tend to be the first recourse."

Advancing Access user survey respondent

3.5 Perceptions of the Russell Group and current application behaviour

Survey participants were asked in what circumstances they would advise students at their school to apply to leading universities, such as those in the Russell Group, as well as being asked whether there are any circumstances in which they would not advise highly academically able students to apply to these universities.

When asked about the circumstances in which they would advise students to apply to leading universities, over 80% of those who responded mentioned predicted grades or academic attainment. Eleven respondents (around a fifth) mentioned a particular set of grades that they would see as a threshold and these ranged from A*A*A* to BBB (one response each). The most frequent responses were AAA and AAB.

Several respondents also mentioned students' temperament – would they thrive in a "more academic environment" and were they "ambitious". Around a third of respondents mentioned students' personal circumstances or personal preferences – occasionally whether the location would be suitable, but also whether the course was appropriate to their interests and longer-term plans. Four respondents had a 'no harm in trying' approach:

“I would even encourage them to do so if their grades were one or two below. No harm in trying provide they don't mind the rejection and have some other more realistic choices amongst their options.”

Advancing Access user survey respondent

Five respondents said that most of their students apply to many Russell Group universities anyway, with one saying that the challenge in their setting was to encourage students to pick an appropriate “back-up” choice in case their exams don't go as well as expected.

Only one respondent mentioned that whether a student met access/widening participation criteria would factor into their advice about whether to apply (although thoughts of this may also have been at play for those suggesting students should apply with lower predicted grades). Given the increasing importance of contextual admissions in leading universities, it may be beneficial for Advancing Access to devote some resource to promoting knowledge and understanding of this area.

When asked whether there were any circumstances in which they would not advise students to apply to leading universities, around half of respondents said no, there were no circumstances when they wouldn't advise a highly academically able students to apply. For those who did give a positive response, around half of these (n=13) described situations where there was a more appropriate course elsewhere, for example if the student wanted to study a more vocational course or something artistic, such as dance. One respondent mentioned higher apprenticeships such as those offered by leading accountancy firms.

Six survey respondents mentioned mental health issues as a reason they might not advise students to apply to a leading university:

“If they struggled with mental health issues under the pressure of exams, I would encourage them to look at less demanding institutions so they could still get a degree but with less of the anxiety-inducing pressure.”

Advancing Access user survey respondent

However, another respondent mentioned that this would be “very rare”. Allusions to ‘personal circumstances’ were equally frequent, with some respondents also mentioning that students may choose to stay at home for university due to personal and health-related circumstances. A small number of respondents were keen to emphasise that while they might not suggest particular institutions to a student, they would not actively discourage them from a choice that the student felt was right for him or herself. Only one respondent mentioned contacting the university about additional support for a potential student:

“I hope there would not be any circumstances where this would occur where I could not contact admissions to support the student.”

Advancing Access user survey respondent

It may be beneficial for Advancing Access to provide more advice and reassurance for users on the ways that leading universities can support vulnerable students, and provide more signposting to where users can access information from particular institutions.

4. Virtual Conference

Advancing Access delivered a virtual conference (VC) on 24 May 2017. This is the second virtual conference delivered by Advancing Access. An earlier VC was delivered in November 2016 and this is covered in our previous evaluation report.

The virtual conference is intended to replicate a ‘real life’ conference (similar to existing Russell Group or UCAS conferences). The online event included interactive webinar presentations, a virtual staff room, and an exhibition hall.

There were five webinar presentations covering the following topics:

- Writing personal statements
- Writing academic references
- Applying to study medicine
- Applying to Oxford and Cambridge
- Preparing for university interviews.

All webinars included a text-based chat forum where delegates could ask questions of presenters. The virtual staff room gave delegates the opportunity to take part in discussion with other attendees and university representatives. The exhibition hall featured stands for each of the 24 partner universities, with the opportunity to conduct live text-based chat with university representatives and download university-specific materials on outreach schemes and activities and scholarships as well as more general information about each university. Attendees were able to sign in and out of the website at any point during the three-hour conference.

4.1 Methodology

The ‘Tracking Events’ dataset provided by Advancing Access included details of all users who had logged into the VC. This was matched with the cleaned dataset of registered users to ensure that schools were accurately identified, then linked with the schools database to give a complete set of contextual data for schools. There were a small number of users that had taken part in the VC but did not appear to have a registered account – these were manually cleaned and categorised.

A survey was sent to all registered VC attendees directly after the event, with up to two reminders sent to non-respondents in the following weeks. Additionally, if interviewees had attended the VC, this was discussed in interviews.

4.2 Characteristics of users

The VC had 259 attendees in total. Table 14 shows the role that attendees selected. For those selecting ‘Other’, their free response answers included roles such as teachers of various subjects, roles related to HE progression (e.g. ‘Higher Education officer’) and pastoral support roles.

Role	Number
Other	90 (35%)
Careers adviser	57 (22%)
[Null]	29 (11%)
Student	23 (9%)
Subject lead	17 (7%)
Head of year 12	14 (5%)
Most able coordinator	11 (4%)
Head of year 13	8 (3%)
Deputy head	7 (3%)
Enrichment officer	3 (1%)
Total	259 (100%)

Table 14 Role of virtual conference attendees

4.3 Contextual data

Note that the measures in this section are the same as those used to give contextual data on schools and colleges with Advancing Access accounts. Fuller description of how the information was derived and any limitations are given in that section.

4.3.1 Schools in England

VC attendees were associated with 130 state schools and colleges in England and Wales (127 in England), and 9 independent schools. The types of establishment are shown in Table 15.

Type of Establishment	Number
Academy converter	52 (37%)
Academy sponsor led	23 (17%)
Further education	23 (17%)
Community school	15 (11%)
Other independent school	9 (6%)
Academy 16-19 converter	5 (4%)
Voluntary aided school	4 (3%)
Foundation school	3 (2%)
Welsh establishment	3 (2%)
Free schools	1 (1%)
Free schools 16 to 19	1 (1%)
Total	139 (100%)

Table 15 Establishment type (from Edubase) of schools attending the virtual conference

As in the analysis of Advancing Access account holders, the total number of schools referred to in each section will differ, and the number of schools referred to on each occasion will be specified.

4.3.2 Opportunity areas

Seven schools in opportunity areas had an attendee at VC2. While this represents only 4% of the total number of schools in opportunity areas, it compares favourably to the rate of attendance from schools outside of opportunity areas. 2% of these schools had a VC attendee, meaning that schools in opportunity areas were around twice as likely to have a VC attendee.

4.3.3 Progression to Higher Education

The percentage of students progressing to higher education from each school or college is investigated in three categories: progression to any higher education institution (HEI); progression to a 'top third' HEI and progression to a Russell Group HEI.

As in the analysis of account holders, we have grouped VC-attending schools and colleges into separate categories to allow comparison against accurate progression averages. Table 16 shows how many schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account were above and below the national average on all three measures for the last three years.

Year	Institution Type	Category: Progression to...	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average progression for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average progression rate
2016/17	Schools	Any HEI	82	39 (48%)	43 (52%)	61%	60%
	Schools	Top third	76	35 (46%)	41 (54%)	26%	26%
	Schools	Russell Group	77	31 (40%)	46 (60%)	19%	17%
	Colleges	Any HEI	25	19 (76%)	6 (24%)	51%	41%
	Colleges	Top third	25	16 (64%)	9 (36%)	15%	10%
	Colleges	Russell Group	27	12 (44%)	15 (56%)	9%	7%
2015/16	Schools	Any HEI	76	47 (62%)	29 (38%)	61%	59%
	Schools	Top third	74	35 (47%)	39 (53%)	26%	25%
	Schools	Russell Group	70	31 (44%)	39 (56%)	19%	17%
	Colleges	Any HEI	21	15 (71%)	6 (29%)	48%	38%
	Colleges	Top third	20	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	15%	10%
	Colleges	Russell Group	22	10 (45%)	12 (55%)	9%	6%
2014/15	Schools	Any HEI	74	38 (51%)	36 (49%)	58%	58%
	Schools	Top third	71	32 (45%)	39 (55%)	26%	26%
	Schools	Russell Group	67	28 (42%)	39 (58%)	18%	17%
	Colleges	Any HEI	27	19 (70%)	8 (30%)	46%	39%
	Colleges	Top third	26	16 (62%)	10 (38%)	15%	10%
	Colleges	Russell Group	26	12 (46%)	14 (54%)	9%	6%

Table 16 Descriptive statistics for Higher Education destinations categories, for schools (defined in Edubase as 'Secondary' or 'All through') and colleges (defined in Edubase as '16 plus') with at least one VC attendee

For progression to any HEI and progression to top third institutions, we see that the average for schools with a VC attendee is roughly similar to the national average each year. For progression to Russell Group institutions the average for schools with a VC attendee is slightly higher than the national average – although given the small number of schools involved, this is unlikely to be statistically significant.

As with Advancing Access account holders, we see that the average progression across all categories for colleges with a VC attendee is higher than the national average. Figure 30 shows the distribution of progression to any HEI (3 year average) for colleges with a VC attendee compared to colleges without. Similar to the pattern for Advancing Access accounts, we see that colleges with progression around 50% are more likely to have attended the VC.

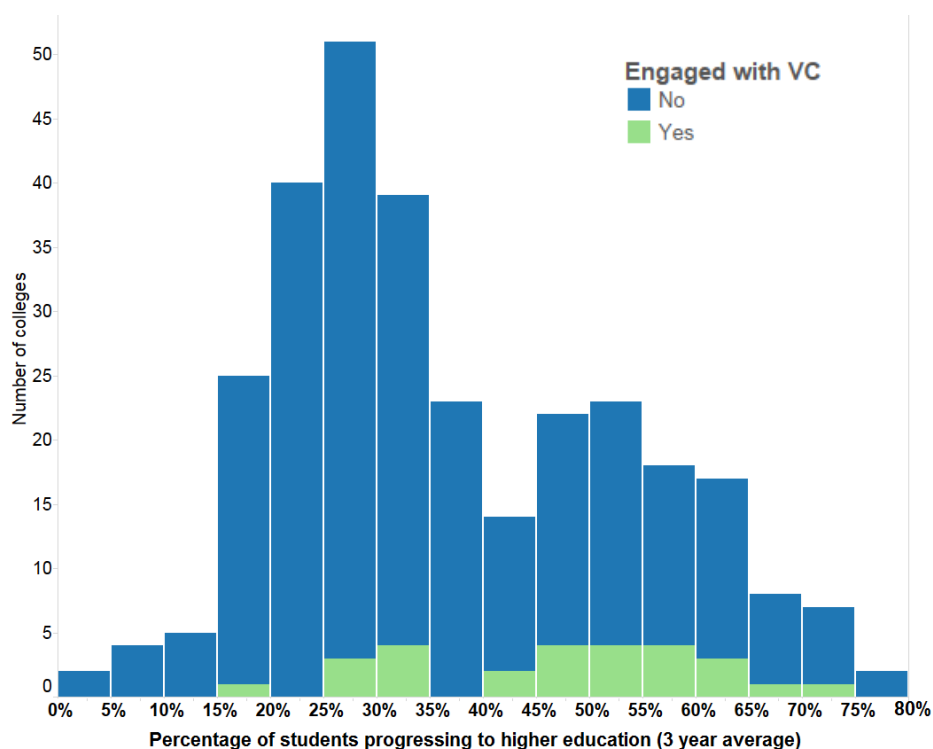


Figure 30 Histogram showing distribution of % of pupils progressing to any HEI, 3 year average; colleges without a VC attendee compared to colleges with a VC attendee.

4.3.4 Attainment (KS5)

To assess attainment at KS5 we looked at three categories: percentage of A level students achieving at least three levels at grades AAB or better, at least two of which are in facilitating subjects; average point score in best 3 A level entries; and average point score per academic entry.

On average, schools and colleges with a VC attendee have slightly lower levels of KS5 attainment than the national average (Table 17). The points made in the previous analysis on the validity of comparison with the national average still hold, and in Figure 31, Figure 32 and Figure 33 we see that the distribution for schools with a VC attendee is similar to the distribution for schools without in all categories. Given the smaller number of schools attending the VC, these figures are more likely to be affected by random variation than those for Advancing Access account holders.

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% 3 A levels at AAB incl. 2 facilitating	107	42 (39%)	65 (61%)	12.9%	13.9%
Average point score in best 3 A levels	107	44 (41%)	63 (59%)	32.3	33.8
Average point score per entry	111	49 (44%)	62 (56%)	29.2	30.6

Table 17 Descriptive statistics for KS5 attainment categories, for schools and colleges with at least one VC attendee

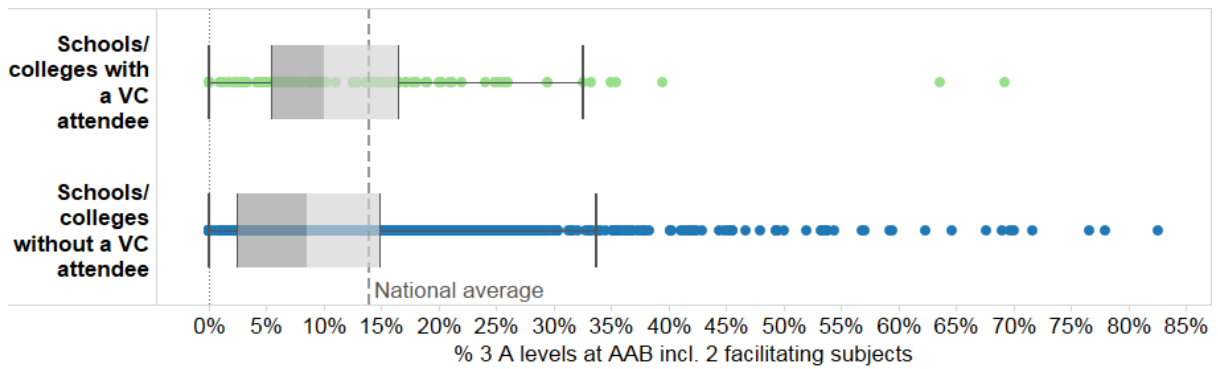


Figure 31 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils achieving AAB or higher in at least two facilitating subjects at A level; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 3%, median = 9%, upper quartile = 15%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 6%, median = 10%, upper quartile = 17%.

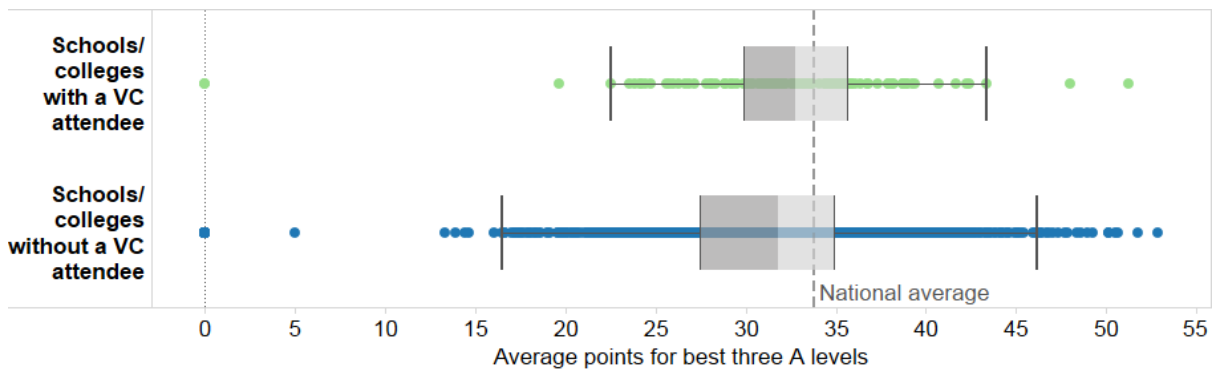


Figure 32 Box and whisker plot showing the average points score for pupils' best 3 A levels; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 27.5, median = 31.8%, upper quartile = 35.0. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 30.0, median = 32.8, upper quartile = 35.7.

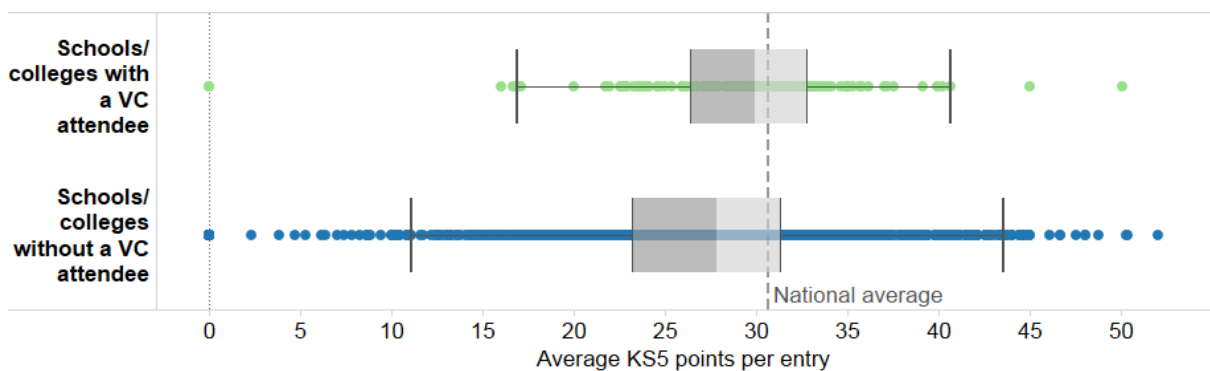


Figure 33 Box and whisker plot showing the average points score for pupils' average KS5 points per entry; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 23.2, median = 27.8, upper quartile = 31.3. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 26.4, median = 29.9, upper quartile = 32.8.

4.3.5 Attainment (KS4)

To measure attainment at KS4 we used the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics at GCSE. We see in Table 18 below that on average, schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account have slightly higher GCSE attainment than the national average.

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% pupils achieving 5+ A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics GCSE	92	57 (62%)	35 (38%)	63%	57.4%
Progress 8 score	91	58 (64%)	33 (36%)	0.03	-0.03

Table 18 Descriptive statistics for KS4 attainment, for schools and colleges with at least one VC attendee

We see in Figure 34 that the distribution of attainment at GCSE is slightly higher for schools with a VC attendee compared to schools without.

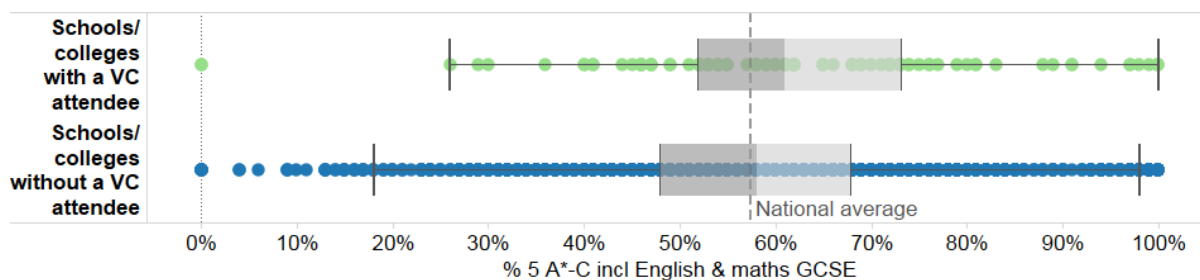


Figure 34 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils achieving at least 5 A*-C or equivalent including English and maths at GCSE; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 48%, median = 58%, upper quartile = 68%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 52%, median = 61%, upper quartile = 73%.

4.3.6 Free School Meals eligibility

Table 19 shows the descriptive statistics on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in each school, and the percentage eligible at any time during the past 6 years (known as 'Ever6') for schools with at least one VC attendee. We see that on free school meals eligibility the average for these schools is the same as the national average, while for Ever6 it is a little below the national average.

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals	96	35 (36%)	61 (64%)	14.7%	14.6%
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM at any time during the past 6 years	95	36 (38%)	59 (62%)	28.6%	29.3%

Table 19 Descriptive statistics for free school meals eligibility, for schools and colleges with at least one VC attendee

Figure 35 shows the distribution of free school meals eligibility for schools with at least one VC attendee compared to schools without, and Figure 36 shows the same information for Ever6 eligibility. The distribution for schools with at least one VC attendee is a little below the distribution for other schools, but has a similar spread.

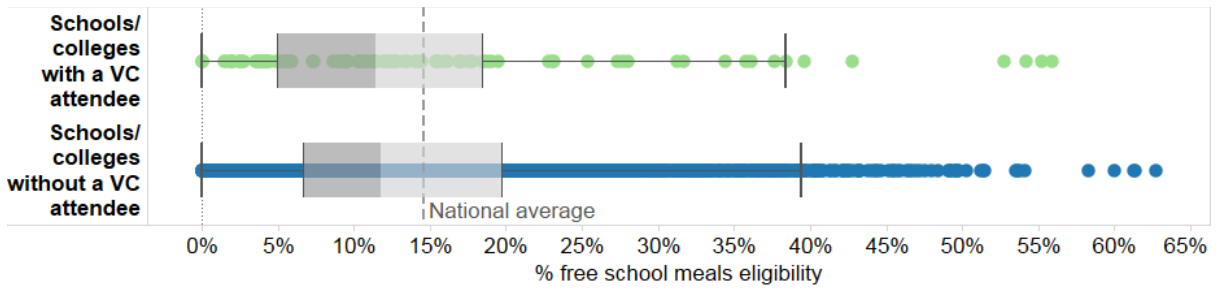


Figure 35 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils eligible for free school meals; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. For schools without a VC attendee, lower quartile = 7%, median = 12%, upper quartile = 20%. For schools with a VC attendee, lower quartile = 5%, median = 11%, upper quartile = 19%.

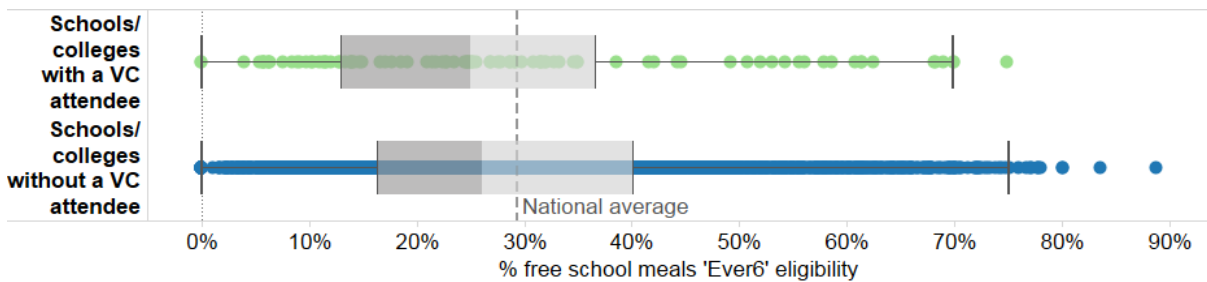


Figure 36 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils eligible for free school meals at any time in the last 6 years; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. For schools without a VC attendee, lower quartile = 16%, median = 26%, upper quartile = 40%. For schools with a VC attendee, lower quartile = 13%, median = 25%, upper quartile = 37%.

4.3.7 POLAR3 and gaps in young participation

As in the previous section, we use a dataset derived from HEFCE's secondary schools data to calculate the percentage of pupils in each school living in quintile 1 and 2 on young participation and participation gaps measures.

Table 20 below shows the descriptive statistics for each category – note that due to rounding of the original data for each ward, totals for some schools come to over 100%. We see that the average on both categories for schools with at least one VC attendee is below the national average.

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage
% pupils living in a POLAR3 young progression quintile 1 or 2 ward	92	38 (41%)	54 (59%)	34%	41.0%
% pupils living in a POLAR3 'gaps' quintile 1 or 2 ward	92	36 (39%)	56 (61%)	33%	40.6%

Table 20 Descriptive statistics for POLAR3 quintile 1 and 2, for schools and colleges with at least one VC attendee

Figure 37 and Figure 38Figure show the distribution of each category for all schools. We see that the distribution for schools with a VC attendee sits a little below that for other schools – although it should be noted that many VC attendees do come from schools with a high proportion of pupils living in quintiles 1 and 2 on both measures.

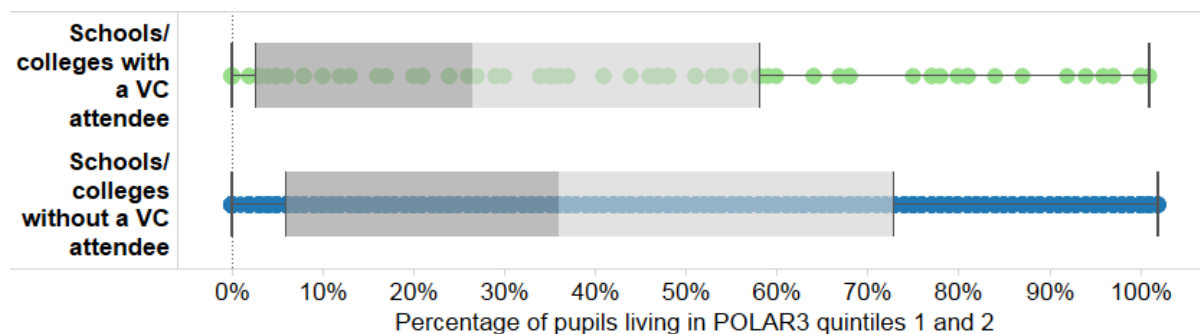


Figure 37 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils living in POLAR3 quintile 1 or 2; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. For schools without a VC attendee, lower quartile = 6%, median = 36%, upper quartile = 73%. For schools with a VC attendee, lower quartile = 3%, median = 27%, upper quartile = 58%.

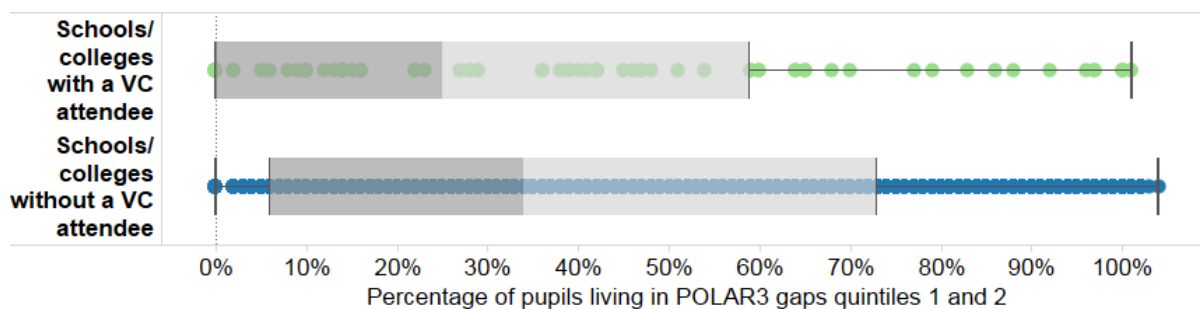


Figure 38 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils living in POLAR3 gaps quintile 1 or 2; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. For schools without a VC attendee, lower quartile = 6%, median = 34%, upper quartile = 73%. For schools with a VC attendee, lower quartile = 0%, median = 25%, upper quartile = 59%.

4.4 Survey and interview responses on the virtual conference

4.4.1 Background of survey respondents

There were 39 valid responses to the survey. Not all respondents answered every question, so totals will vary throughout the analysis.

38 respondents identified a particular school that they were associated with – most were schools in England, but two respondents were associated with a school in Kenya and one with an international school in Bangkok. The respondent who was not associated with a school was an independent careers adviser.

Respondents were asked to select their role and responses are shown in Table 21 below. Those who selected 'Other' gave details of roles related to careers and academic support (e.g. 'Director of Student Development'; 'Head of Access to Higher Education'). Some respondents had roles related to 'able and talented' students and one was Oxbridge coordinator alongside a general careers advice role.

Role	Number	Percentage
Careers Adviser	14	36%
Other	12	31%
Head of Sixth Form	4	10%
Head of Subject (or equivalent)	4	10%
Teacher	3	8%
Assistant Head of Sixth Form	2	5%
Total	39	

Table 21 Number and percentage of responses to 'What is your role in school/college?' (VC)

Respondents were also asked how long they had been working in schools, and the responses ranged from 1-31 years, with an average of 14 years. When asked how long they had been working in their current school or college, the average was 7.5 years and responses ranged from 0-29 years. Out of those who responded regarding whether they had been a student ambassador or student mentor while at university, 11% (N=4) had done so.

4.4.2 Background of schools

The majority of respondents selected the post-16 (including 11-18) stage of education as best characterising the school/college they worked in, with 13% (N=5) of those who responded to this question saying they worked with the 11-16 range. When those working in 11-16 schools were asked about the post-16 destinations of their students, 2 selected A-levels and 2 selected career-focused qualifications such as BTEC or NVQ.

For those who selected post-16 (including 11-18) as best characterising their school/college, the majority of those who responded regarding the post-18 destinations of their students selected 'University' (97%, N=32).

Post-16 respondents were also asked, 'If students from your school / college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?', and could select the main three universities from three drop down lists. There were 92 selections in total, of which 46 (50%) were Russell Group institutions.

The selections were combined for analysis and the universities selected more than twice, are shown in Table 22. Table 23 shows all Russell Group universities selected. The full set of responses can be found in Appendix 2.

Institution	N
University of Bristol	6
University of Nottingham	6
University of Sheffield	6
Sheffield Hallam University	5
University of Leeds	5
Manchester Metropolitan University	4
Cardiff University (Prifysgol Caerdydd)	3
Leeds Beckett University (formerly Leeds Metropolitan University)	3
University of Birmingham	3
University of Manchester	3
Bournemouth University	2
Northumbria University Newcastle	2
Oxford Brookes University	2
University of Derby	2
University of Kent	2
University of Portsmouth	2
University of Roehampton	2
University of Southampton	2
University of Warwick	2

Table 22 Responses to 'If students from your school/college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?'; institutions selected twice or more

Institution	N
University of Bristol	6
University of Nottingham	6
University of Sheffield	6
University of Leeds	5
Cardiff University (Prifysgol Caerdydd)	3
University of Birmingham	3
University of Manchester	3
University of Southampton	2
University of Warwick	2
Durham University	1
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)	1
King's College London	1
Newcastle University	1
Queen Mary, University of London	1
University College London	1
University of Cambridge	1
University of Exeter	1
University of Liverpool	1
University of York	1

Table 23 Responses to 'If students from your school/college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?'; all Russell Group institutions selected

4.4.3 Engagement with the virtual conference

Respondents were asked how long they had spent engaged with the VC. The most frequent response was 1-2 hours at 66% (N=23). 26% of respondents (N=9) had stayed less than an hour, and 9% of respondents (N=3) had stayed for the full three hours.

Participants were asked which VC presentations they had attended (Figure 39). The most frequent response was 'What makes a successful personal statement?', with 28 respondents having attended this session.

Number of responses

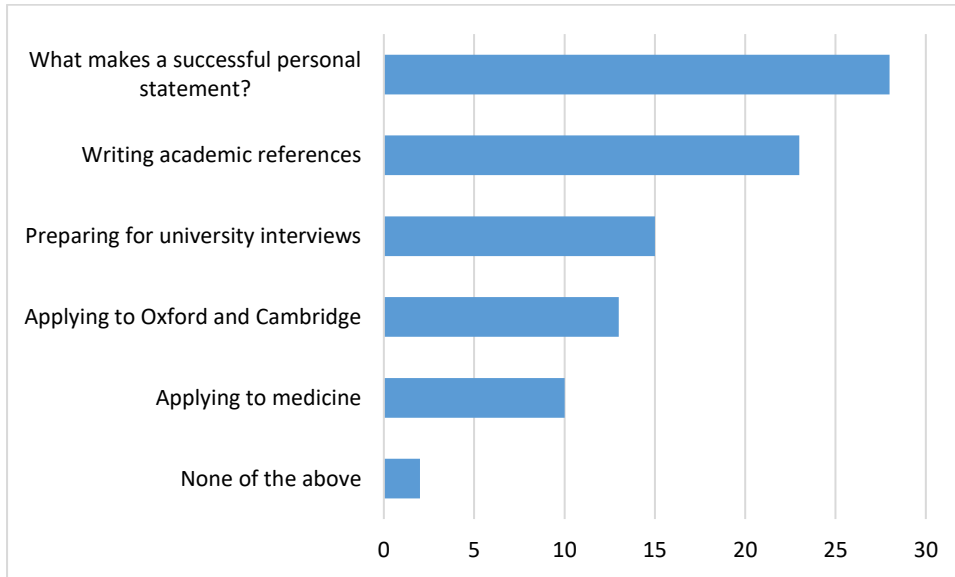


Figure 39 Responses to 'Please select which, if any, of the online presentations you attended'

Participants were asked how they had used the VC areas (Figure 40). The online presentations were most frequently attended, and all sections were attended by over 40% of respondents. Eight respondents had attended all three areas and a further 12 had attended two areas.

Number of responses

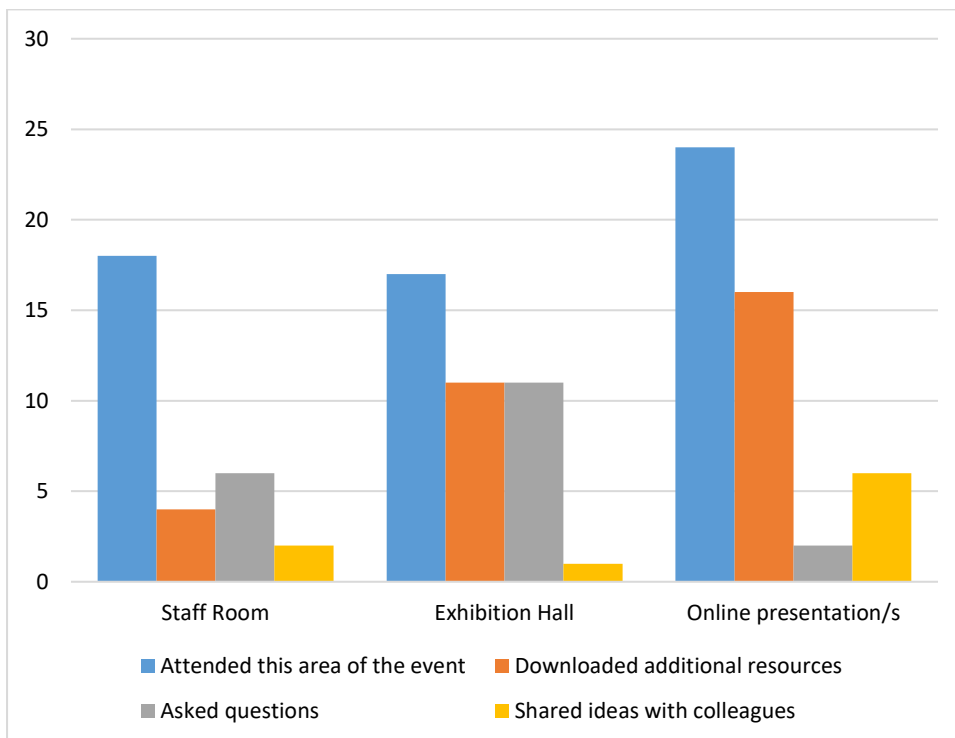


Figure 40 Responses to 'In what ways did you engage with the following virtual conference areas?'

Participants were asked how they intended to use the information and resources that they gathered from each area of the virtual conference (Figure 41). Respondents primarily intended to use the information and resources to develop their own knowledge. Directing students and colleagues to the information and resources were also frequent responses.

Number of Responses

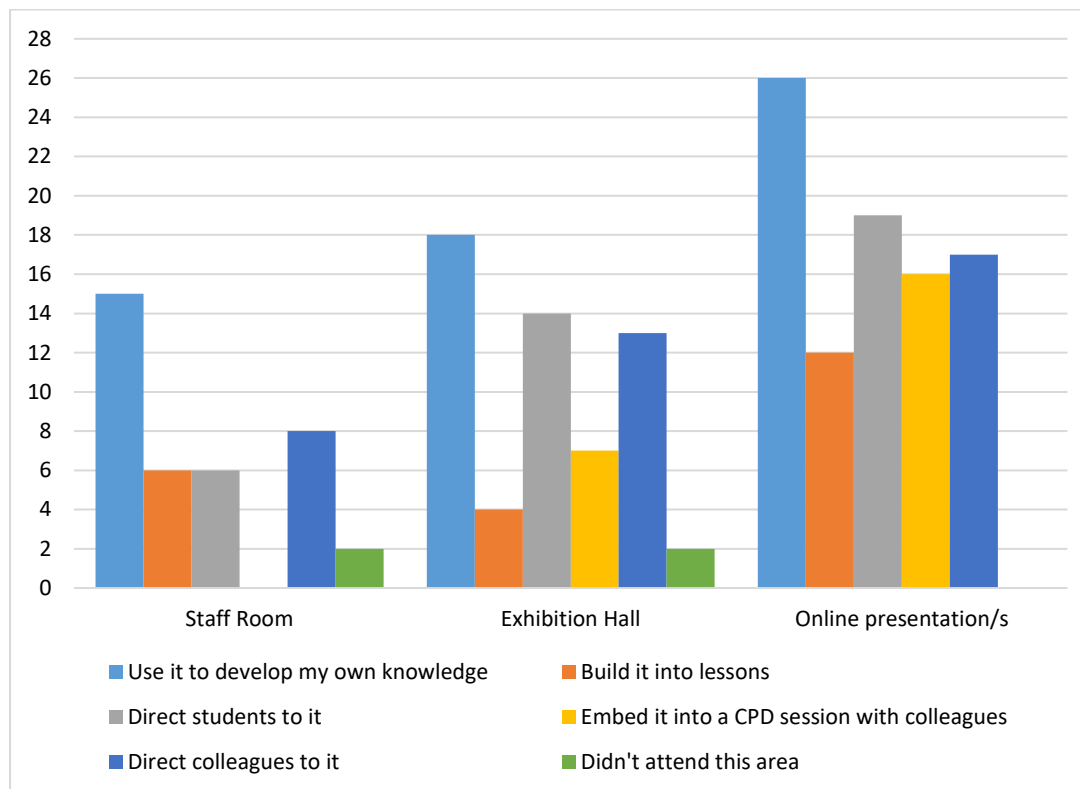


Figure 41 Responses to 'How do you intend to use the information and resources you picked up at each of the virtual conference areas?'

4.4.4 Opinions and potential outcomes

The majority of free response feedback in the survey was positive. While one respondent felt that the VC was “no substitute for physical presence”, many felt that it was just as useful as attending a physical conference and many appreciated the flexibility and ease of attending.

“I really loved the concept and in the past I have had to attend separate events run by individual universities. This was more convenient.”

Virtual conference survey respondent

This comment was fairly typical of the responses in the survey. Generally, respondents found the format and content useful and engaging. Respondents found it useful to see content from a range of universities and intended to apply this when supporting students:

“PowerPoint material on personal statements [was] especially useful - contrasting university approaches. Getting across to students how the statement needs to fulfil the differing needs of very differing universities is difficult at best.”

Virtual conference survey respondent

One respondent mentioned that they intended to include some of the resources in their school’s “university guidance workbook”.

Respondents were asked to show their level of agreement with a range of statements about the quality of the information and resources available in the VC (Figure 42). 100% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the resources were useful, up to date, accurate and reflect their own experience. Respondents were less likely to agree that the information and resources provided information that they didn't know before, with 70% of respondents agreeing with this.

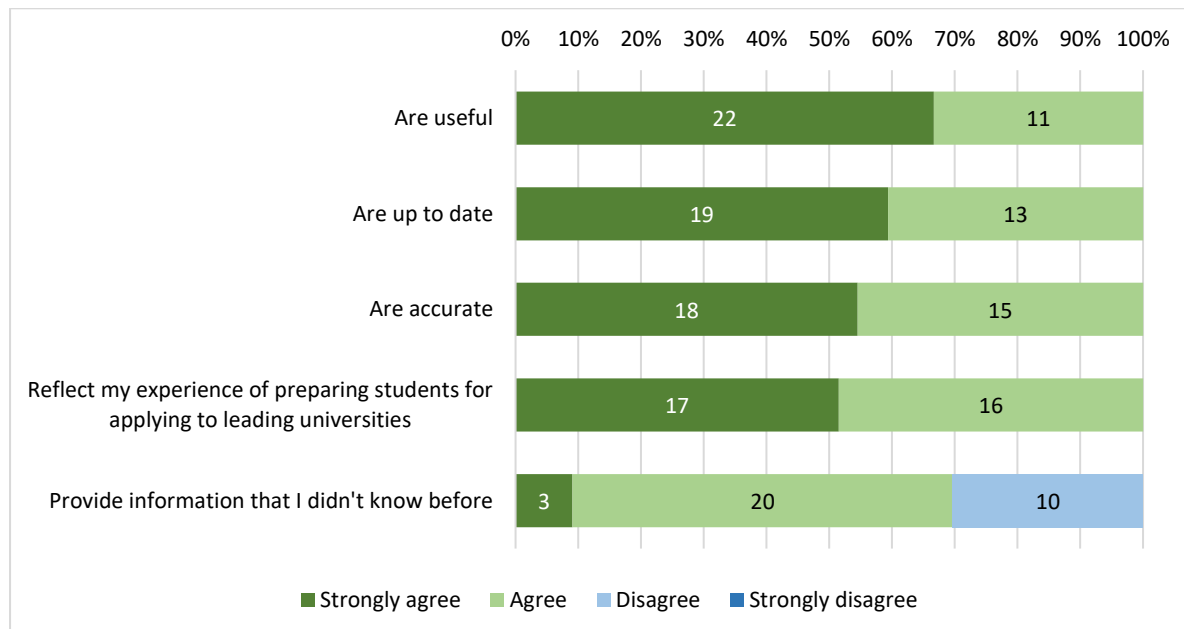


Figure 42 Responses to 'Please show how much you agree with the following statements about the Advancing Access virtual conference: The information and resources that I picked up...'

Participants were asked how far they agreed that Advancing Access had improved their ability to support students in a range of areas, and their responses can be seen in Figure 43. Respondents were most likely to agree that Advancing Access had helped them support students with how to write a good personal statement (94%), which reflects the content of the presentations that respondents attended. The admissions processes at each university and how the application is dealt with and writing references to support university applications also scored particularly highly, with both having 93% agreement.

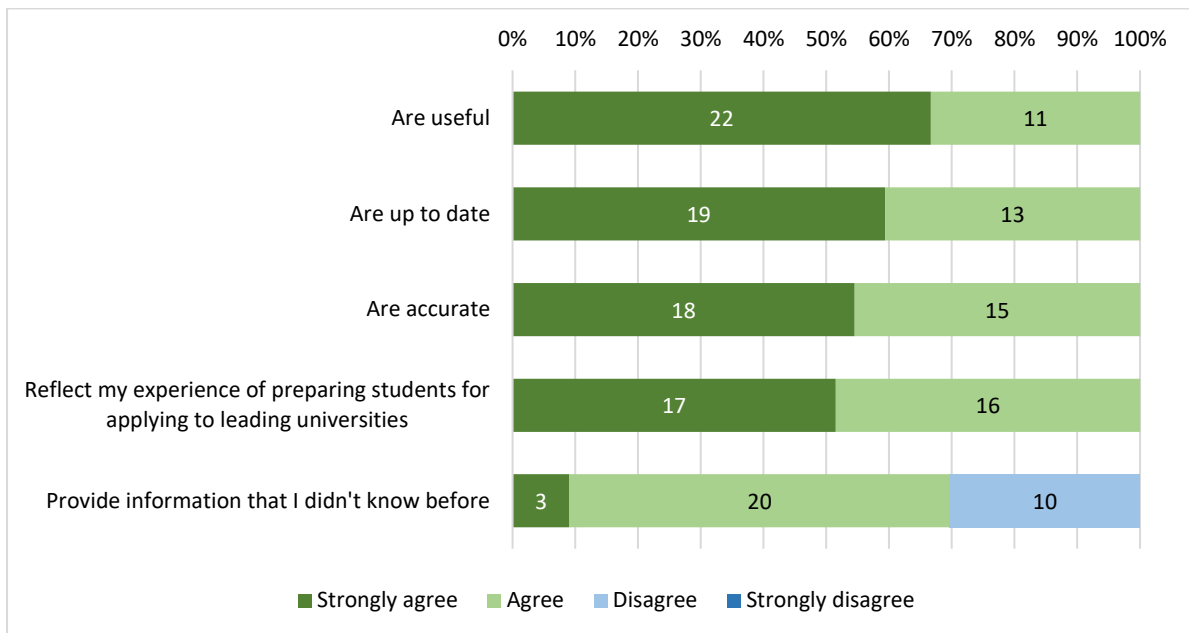


Figure 43 Responses to 'Please show how much you agree with the following statements about the Advancing Access virtual conference: The Advancing Access virtual conference has improved my ability to support students with...'

When participants were asked about the likelihood of changing the advice they give to students as a result of engaging with the Advancing Access website (Figure 44), 21% of respondents said that they were more likely to advise their students to apply to leading universities such as those in the Russell Group and 15% said that they were more likely to encourage more of their students to consider university.

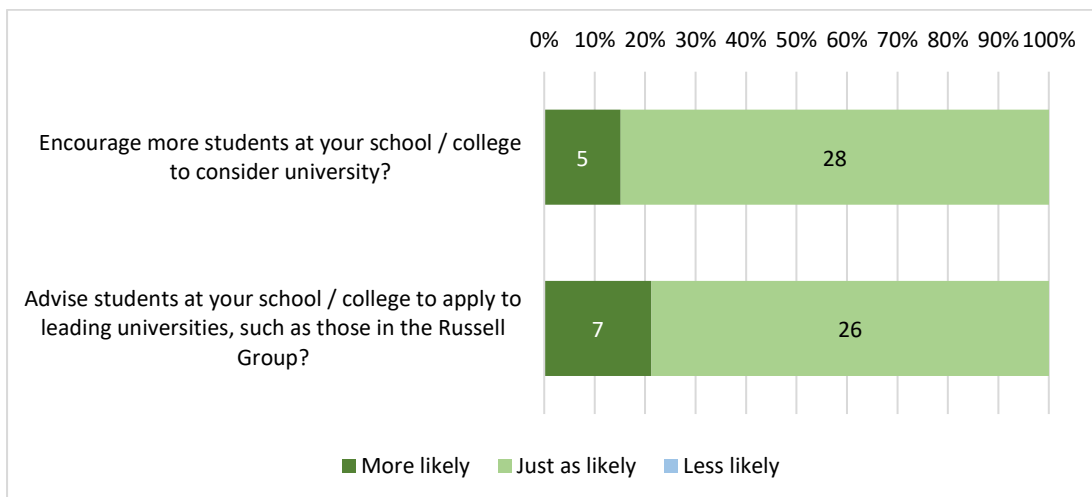


Figure 44 Responses to 'As a result of engaging with the information and resources available as part of the Advancing Access virtual conference, how likely are you now to...'

When asked how likely they were to attend another VC in the future, 83% of respondents (N=29) said that this was very likely, with a further 11% (N=4) saying it was fairly likely (Figure 45). This key finding demonstrates that attendees found the VC to be a valuable use of their time.

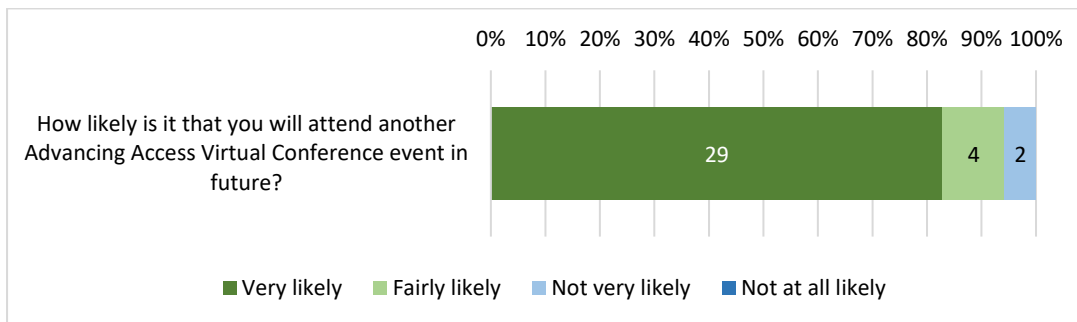


Figure 45 Responses to 'How likely is it that you will attend another Advancing Access virtual conference event in future?'

Barriers to use

Participants were asked to choose from a range of factors which was most likely to prevent them from using Advancing Access resources, and which factors were likely to limit the impact of the resources. The majority of respondents said that no factors were likely to prevent their use (56%, N=19) or limit the impact (53%, N=17). Of those who did pick a limiting factor, 'not enough time' was the most frequent for both questions (29% and 25% respectively). 16% of respondents thought that students' own perceptions/aspirations were most likely to limit the impact of the resources.

4.4.5 Practical and technical feedback

Respondents were asked how they heard about the VC. Some open responses were categorised in the analysis; responses are shown in Figure 46. Respondents mentioned various advisers' conferences, including those run by the University of Birmingham, the University of Nottingham and the University of Liverpool.

Number of responses

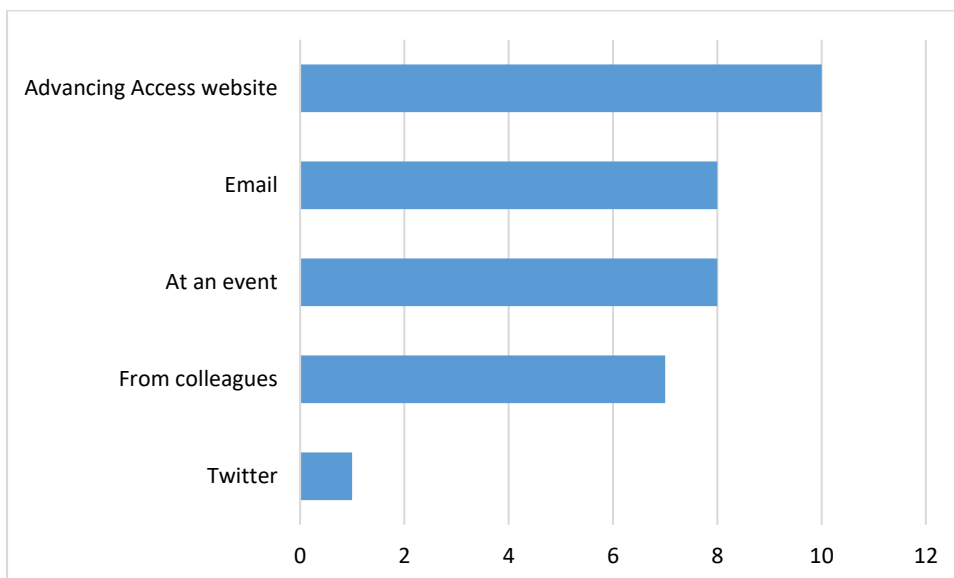


Figure 46 Responses to 'How did you hear about the Advancing Access virtual conference?'

Participants were asked what factors influenced their decision to attend the VC and responses are shown in Figure 47.

Number of responses

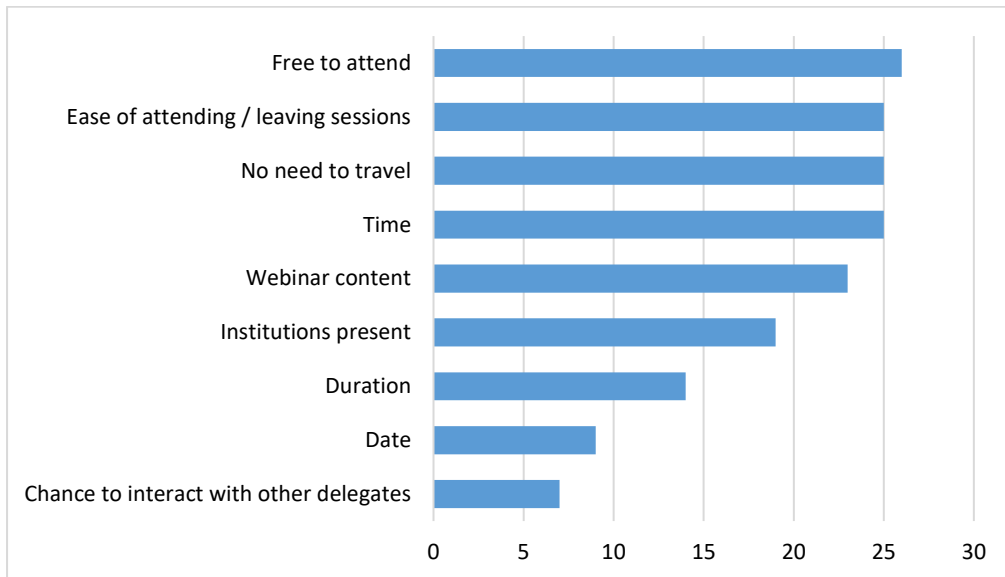


Figure 47 Responses to 'What factors influenced your attendance at this conference?'

When asked for feedback on the timing of the event, there was a mix of positive and negative responses. Some respondents (in an interview as well as the survey) took part in the VC from school because they would not have been able to get home in time for the start, but then had to leave before the end as the school buildings needed to close. However, there were also positive responses about the timing and respondents and interviewees valued the opportunity to watch presentations afterwards if they could not watch everything on the day.

"It was really good timing as you could join anytime and there was enough time to see the presentations and speak to various advisers."

Virtual conference survey respondent

One survey respondent mentioned that some of their questions weren't answered, and an interview respondent found that they needed to keep checking back to the exhibition stand to see whether their question had been answered. A notification system or email follow-up to questions that cannot be answered during the VC may help with this.

5. Discussion and recommendations

In this section we review the findings of the evaluation against its initial research questions, and make recommendations for Advancing Access' development. We also recommend methods for undertaking further research to address the research questions.

The key limitation for this evaluation was timing. The majority of resources were released online in May 2017. Schools and colleges would be likely to need most of the resources at the start of the university applications period, from September – December. This report was produced in October 2017, meaning that data collection of website use and survey responses came to an end in early September. Most interviews were conducted in the 2016/17 academic year, with only one taking place in October 2017.

We see in Figure 29 (p33) that fewer than 20% of survey respondents had had the opportunity to use the resources at the point of completing the survey, with only 7% of respondents having used the resources in strand 3 (how do admissions processes work?). Interview responses indicated that advisers and key teachers typically used materials from a range of sources when interacting with pupils and staff – interviewees talked about their intention to thoroughly review the Advancing Access resources and incorporate them into their plans, but at the point of data collection this had mostly not yet taken place.

Therefore it is difficult to comment on the impact that Advancing Access is having in schools and colleges – this impact is, for the most part, yet to manifest. Rather, the focus of this report has been on reach, potential impact, and potential development.

5.1 Does the intervention increase knowledge of enabling factors for progression to leading universities for teachers and advisers?

There is evidence that Advancing Access increases knowledge of enabling factors for progression to leading universities. Interview findings indicated that for experienced advisers, gains in knowledge would often be small but potentially impactful. Examples included answers to individual questions about entry requirements for specific courses and institutions posed in the virtual conference, and information about contextual admissions. This information might change the advice that they give to just a single student, but the impact on that student could be substantial, leading to them applying to a course that they might otherwise not have done.

Survey responses indicated that Advancing Access increases users' knowledge. 76% of respondents in the website user survey and 70% in the virtual conference survey agreed that Advancing Access had given them information that they did not know before. There were also high levels of agreement in both surveys when respondents were asked whether Advancing Access had improved their ability to support students in a range of areas (ranging from 69% to 87% agreement across categories in the website user survey and 37% - 94% in the virtual conference survey).

A potential limitation to gains in knowledge for experienced advisers is their assumption that Advancing Access gives information that they already know. For example, interviewees talked about using Advancing Access to pick out a resource to fulfil a particular training need, but also commented that they could get similar resources elsewhere. If materials contain information that is new, or specific to leading/Russell Group institutions, Advancing Access should consider highlighting this to reduce the risk of users assuming that the information agrees with their current knowledge and assumptions and hence not engaging as fully as they otherwise might.

5.2 Does the intervention support attitudinal change regarding leading universities for teachers and advisers?

There is some evidence that Advancing Access resources support attitudinal change regarding leading universities. In surveys, 30% of respondents to the website user survey and 21% of

respondents to the VC survey said that they were more likely to advise their students to apply to leading universities such as those in the Russell Group.

Interview findings indicated that interaction with Advancing Access was part of a bigger picture of changing perceptions about the Russell Group. Interviewees tended to be well-informed about the requirements and admissions procedures of leading universities (the general principles rather than the detail) and they felt that Advancing Access would be valuable as a way to quickly remedy misconceptions and fill gaps in knowledge for staff with less expertise.

5.3 If changes in knowledge and attitudes take place for teachers and advisers, how does this affect learners?

At this stage of Advancing Access' development there is limited information about how changes for teachers and advisers might impact on learners. One interviewee, who had been involved in piloting Advancing Access and thus had been able to engage with the resources from an early stage, talked enthusiastically about the impact of the video case studies on her students. The interviewee felt that the students were able to identify with the video content and that this affected their perception of their own ability and opportunities more than would have been possible with second-hand information. However, decisions about educational pathways can be complex and it is not yet clear what the impact on learners might be.

5.4 Does the intervention increase the likelihood of higher-achieving learners at KS4 progressing to study facilitating subjects at KS5 / learners at KS5 making high-quality applications to leading universities?

It is difficult to answer both of these questions with any certainty using the data available at this stage. Ideally, this topic would be investigated further using the National Pupil Database (NPD) and linked HESA data, as this would give an accurate measure of learners' subject choice and HE destinations. However, there is a substantial time lag on the availability of this data: for example, for learners making KS5 choices in 2017/18 – starting study in 2018/19 – the first data on the subjects they have chosen would be available when their results are published after October 2020. Similarly for HE applications, learners applying in 2017/18 would attend university in September 2018, and data on this would first be published by HESA in 2019. The earliest that any analysis and findings could be published on this kind of data is around 2021. Advancing Access should continue to monitor proxy indicators of impact such as user feedback in the meantime.

5.5 Has the intervention reached the intended audience?

The theme emerging from the contextual data on school with an Advancing Access account (and attending the virtual conference) is that they are, in general, similar to the broader population of schools. The contextual categories tend to have a broad spread of data points, with many schools on either side of the national average.

An important risk for Advancing Access was that the resources and information would mainly be taken up by schools that are already 'doing well' with progression to higher education and leading universities. The materials are publicly available online and many schools of this type have engaged. However, the spread of data shows that many schools and colleges with lower rates of progression (on school-level destination measures and POLAR3 progression data); high rates of free school meals eligibility and lower average attainment have also engaged with the resources and the Virtual conference.

5.6 How is the intervention used by the schools and colleges at which it is targeted?

Survey responses about how Advancing Access resources have been used were limited, with most respondents not yet having used them in practice. At the outset of the evaluation we hoped to

compare survey responses from ‘target schools’ with those from other schools. However, uptake from target schools and the number of survey responses received meant that this was not possible.

Interviews gave some indication of how Advancing Access is used and perceived differently by ‘target’ and ‘non-target’ schools. One interview was conducted with a school that had high rates of progression to Russell Group universities. This interview indicated that for advisers that already have detailed knowledge, Advancing Access does not offer new information and therefore has limited appeal. As the learners in this school already aspired to attend leading institutions and were well-informed by their parents, the interviewee felt that the resources were not sufficiently detailed for them.

In contrast, a careers adviser working in a range of schools felt that the student resources would provide good preparation for students, particularly if used by a school in advance of a one-to-one guidance interview. This interviewee felt that the resources could play an important role in prompting students to consider their future pathways in a way that they would not have done previously.

One interviewee raised the issue of school budgets and the impact that this was having on advice and guidance provision. The interviewee felt that although she had a high level of expertise and did not need to learn much from the materials, they were a useful aid for teachers who, because of budget cuts, were now expected to deliver advice and guidance as part of their normal role (for example, in tutorial sessions) and were unlikely to have been well-trained to do so.

5.7 Future development

5.7.1 Targeting

Effective targeting of Advancing Access requires a delicate balance. On the one hand, it is desirable to focus on schools and colleges with the lowest rates of progression to higher education, and lower average attainment. But on the other hand, targeting a school where only one or two pupils are likely to meet the required attainment levels to go on to a leading university, or a college where the courses offered are unsuitable preparation for most courses at these universities, is unlikely to give the best return on investment of time and other resources. A balanced approach, targeting schools and colleges that already send a small number of pupils to leading universities but could potentially send more, may be the most effective way to target the promotion of Advancing Access going forward.

A new plan for targeting schools should be developed, based on the contextual data used in this evaluation and similar data for other areas. The plan should include multiple categories of targeting aligned to Advancing Access’ strategic priorities. Schools or areas meeting a range of targeting criteria could receive the most intensive promotional activity (e.g. face to face visits), with a sliding scale of activity levels for groups meeting fewer targeting criteria. A future evaluation could then examine the relationship between the promotional activities undertaken and website engagement to assess the impact of individual activities.

5.7.2 Promotion

Much of Advancing Access’ resource since its establishment has been focussed on creating the website and resource materials. Now that this work is complete, more time can be spent on targeted promotion of the available resources. Repeat engagement with the site is low, with many users logging in only once. While this may indicate that users are downloading everything they need on their first visit and can use the resources without needing return, there may also be opportunity to drive repeat engagement with targeted email campaigns. For example, particular resources could be highlighted at key points in the year. Emails could also be used after users have downloaded resources, to prompt them to use them. The most common reason that survey respondents cited when asked what might prevent them from using the resources was lack of time; Advancing Access is competing for attention with many other sources of information and priorities for teachers.

6. Conclusion

Advancing Access resources have only recently been released, and this limits the amount of impact that can be detected by evaluation at this stage. We have looked in detail at the characteristics of schools engaging with Advancing Access. This shows that Advancing Access has reached a broad audience that, in England, reflects the characteristics of the general population of schools. Advancing Access can now reflect on their targeting priorities and undertake new promotional activity to reach more of their target schools.

The evaluation has found some good evidence of promise. Advancing Access users find the information and resources useful, highly trustworthy and reliable. Survey and interview respondents have given examples of early impact and many intend to embed Advancing Access resources in their practice this year. The challenge for Advancing Access is ensuring that they meet users' needs and hold their attention amongst a range of competing resources. Advancing Access should continue to communicate with users to highlight key features of what is offered and seek feedback on how to develop.

References

- HEFCE. (2012). *POLAR3: Young participation rates in higher education* (No. 26). London: Higher Education Funding Council for England. Retrieved from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2012/201226/>
- HEFCE. (2016). Participation by secondary school areas. Retrieved October 16, 2017, from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/secondary/>

Appendix 1 Technical notes on website user datasets

Four datasets (two raw datasets and two cleaned versions of these) were provided by Advancing Access for use in this report. The 'Registered Accounts' dataset included a single line for each user who had registered for a website account; fields included first name, surname, email address, role, school, sign in count (the number of times the user had signed in to their account), 'current sign in at' (the date and time of the most recent occasion the user signed in to their account) and 'created at' (the date and time that the user created their account).

This dataset also included fields for further information about the users' school. These were populated by Advancing Access based on data available from Edubase⁵ and fields included URN (unique reference number as used by the Department for Education) and several other fields about school characteristics. The information in some fields was in varying formats and they were not used in this analysis.

The 'Tracking Events' dataset included a single line for each activity on the site: when a user was logged into their account, each page they visited and resource they accessed was recorded.

For the analysis that follows we have used the cleaned version of each dataset. Further cleaning was undertaken as part of the analysis and this is detailed in Appendix 1.

Registered accounts

A check for duplicate users was undertaken using the email address column. One user appeared to have been able to create two accounts with the same email address by using some uppercase letters in one version. One of the accounts had a sign in count of 4 and the other had a count of 0, so the latter was removed.

The 'UTC' text in the 'Current sign in at' field was removed using the Find/Replace function to allow Tableau to interpret the field as Date/Time.

The data that was provided by Advancing Access included school names, postcodes, URNs and other fields from Edubase linked to this data. However, the data included some inconsistencies – for example, there were multiple accounts for a particular school and around two-thirds of these were associated with one URN and a third associated with another. Similarly, for another school with multiple accounts, some accounts contained the school name but most contained only the postcode and URN, some the correct URN but a variation on the postcode, and some (identified by matching email address roots) contained a slightly different postcode and different URN. The data was cleaned to provide the most complete dataset possible. Where data was missing, reasonable assumptions were made based on email addresses and any other fields available.

Based on the nature of the errors observed, it appears that one of the issues with the data provided may be that the website is linked to a version of Edubase that includes closed as well as open establishments. Many schools that had converted to academy status were showing some URNs and linked information for their new status and some related to their previous status.

Where the same school was found to be listed under two or more variations on the same name, the format of the name from our schools database (originally based on Edubase) was used.

Other manual cleaning also took place. For example, one user had a university email address but had also identified a school; googling the individual and university showed that they were employed there in student recruitment and so the school detail was removed. Accounts created by members of the

⁵ <https://www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>

research team were removed. Some accounts had been created that were clearly ‘dummy accounts’, presumably by the web development team as part of web testing. These were characterised by email addresses ending in ‘new.ac.uk’, ‘newest.ac.uk’ etc. and by user names such as ‘New User’ and ‘Scottish School’. Around 15 accounts of this sort were removed.

Tracking events

For the user where one account had been removed from the Registered Accounts dataset (see above), a check was made and activities showed under both versions of the email address (lowercase and capitalised). All these activities were retained.

Progression to Higher Education

When comparisons are made with the national distribution, this is for all schools in the schools database excluding independent schools and Welsh establishments. Note that other categories such as pupil referral units and special schools were removed from the database before any analysis.

For the annual figures in each category, the national average was that specified by the DfE for state maintained schools in the datasets provided. For the three year average progression figures, the national average was calculated for this report as a mean average of the ‘three year average’ variables.

POLAR3 and young participation data

The initial dataset was published by HEFCE (HEFCE, 2016). The dataset was reshaped to show the percentage of pupils in each school from each quintile (POLAR3 and gaps). The dataset was then matched into the schools database using postcode and manual matching, as the HEFCE data did not include a unique identifier such as URN or DfE number. For schools with duplicate postcodes, these were removed from the dataset while the matching formula was used and manually matched by checking postcodes and names.

The manual matching revealed some inconsistencies between the HEFCE data and the version of Edubase underpinning the schools database – which is to be expected given that HEFCE’s school list was generated at a fixed time point in 2016 or prior. For example, the HEFCE dataset included instances of girls and boys schools that had since merged to become single schools. Where issues like this arose, the data was not included in the schools database – although it should be noted that some data for schools that have changed status could have been included in the postcode matching process.

Appendix 2 Responses to 'If students from your school / college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?'

Institution	N
Newcastle University	10
Northumbria University Newcastle	9
University of Liverpool	8
Cardiff University (Prifysgol Caerdydd)	6
Sheffield Hallam University	6
University of Nottingham	6
University of Sunderland	6
Manchester Metropolitan University	5
University of Bristol	5
University of Lincoln	5
University of Manchester	5
Durham University	4
University of Leeds	4
University of Portsmouth	4
University of Sheffield	4
University of Southampton	4
City University London	3
Nottingham Trent University	3
Teesside University	3
University of Exeter	3
University of Greenwich	3
University of Huddersfield	3
Bournemouth University	2
Cardiff Metropolitan University (Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd)	2
Liverpool John Moores University	2
Plymouth University	2
Queen Mary, University of London	2
Staffordshire University	2
Swansea University (Prifysgol Abertawe)	2
University of Birmingham	2
University of Bradford	2
University of Cambridge	2
University of Essex	2
University of Leicester	2
University of Salford	2
University of Sussex	2
University of Warwick	2
Arts University Bournemouth	1
Birmingham City University	1

Brunel University London	1
Edge Hill University	1
Goldsmiths, University of London	1
Leeds Beckett University (formerly Leeds Metropolitan University)	1
Liverpool Hope University	1
London South Bank University	1
Middlesex University	1
Oxford Brookes University	1
Queen's University Belfast	1
University Campus Suffolk	1
University of Bath	1
University of Brighton	1
University of Central Lancashire	1
University of Chester	1
University of Cumbria	1
University of Derby	1
University of East Anglia	1
University of Edinburgh, The	1
University of Glasgow	1
University of Hertfordshire	1
University of Hull	1
University of Kent	1
University of Northampton, The	1
University of Oxford	1
University of South Wales (Prifysgol De Cymru)	1
University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth	1
University of Surrey	1
University of the West of England, Bristol	1
University of Ulster	1
University of Westminster	1
University of York	1
York St John University	1

Table 24 Advancing Access account holders survey respondents

Institution	N
University of Bristol	6
University of Nottingham	6
University of Sheffield	6
Sheffield Hallam University	5
University of Leeds	5
Manchester Metropolitan University	4
Cardiff University (Prifysgol Caerdydd)	3
Leeds Beckett University (formerly Leeds Metropolitan University)	3
University of Birmingham	3
University of Manchester	3
Bournemouth University	2
Northumbria University Newcastle	2
Oxford Brookes University	2
University of Derby	2
University of Kent	2
University of Portsmouth	2
University of Roehampton	2
University of Southampton	2
University of Warwick	2
Birmingham City University	1
Brunel University London	1
City University London	1
De Montfort University	1
Durham University	1
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)	1
Keele University	1
King's College London	1
Kingston University	1
Lancaster University	1
Newcastle University	1
Nottingham Trent University	1
Plymouth University	1
Queen Mary, University of London	1
Staffordshire University	1
University College London	1
University of Bradford	1
University of Cambridge	1
University of Chichester	1
University of Exeter	1
University of Hertfordshire	1
University of Huddersfield	1

University of Liverpool	1
University of Northampton, The	1
University of Sunderland	1
University of Surrey	1
University of the West of England, Bristol	1
University of Westminster	1
University of Worcester	1
University of York	1

Table 25 Virtual conference survey respondents