

# The impact of widening participation initiatives

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## The Role of Research and Impact Evaluation

Provides an evidence base for what works - and for what doesn't

It is about learning, critical reflection and continuous improvement


Enables us to develop the theories and methods to better understand and tackle under-representation in higher education

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## Expectation vs experience: might transition gaps predict undergraduate students' outcome gaps?

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on thematic analysis of one-to-one interviews with undergraduate students, this paper offers initial, exploratory analysis of whether known outcome differentials may be partly attributable to students' transition into university. The study is located in the English higher education sector, where fee increases have been accompanied by wider availability of metrics and outcome differentials have become a particular focus of attention. Specifically, this paper examines (in)congruence between students' expectations of higher education and their experience while at university, tracking how recalled pre-arrival expectations correlate with socio-economic status and school type. In the case of students from 'widening participation' (WP) backgrounds, the effect of attendance at an intervention (access) programme is also considered. Findings point to a complex web of factors influencing the undergraduate experience of students within the same institution. For WP students, the widest gaps are in relation to pedagogy, as the culture and curricula of higher education are initially found inconsistent with expectations. Intervention programmes make a small positive difference, primarily because social and academic confidence is enhanced. For students educated at independent schools the widest gaps arise in relation to assessment, for which university-level support and guidance are felt to be less personalised than expected. On a structural level, findings question the reliability of output metrics as proxies for teaching quality given the extent to which they are predicted by student backgrounds and by the nature of their individual transition into higher education.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

*Studies in Higher Education*  
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## Widening participation through admissions policy – a British case study of school and university performance

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It has been widely claimed that UK students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds but nevertheless having the potential to benefit from a degree programme are being denied higher education places because of their relatively poor paper qualifications. As a consequence, the claim continues, students from independent schools have an advantage in the competition for such places. Universities have responded to such claims, and incentives from the government to do so, by introducing widening participation programmes, but very little research has been done which explores whether students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are admitted to elite universities perform as well as their counterparts with better entry qualifications. Using a large data set from one university, this article explores performance by students at A-level and their first and final university years. Students from independent schools performed better at A-level than those from state schools, but not at their university examinations, other things being equal.

**Keywords:** widening participation; underachievement; academic achievement; admission conditions; university practices

# ADMISSIONS IN CONTEXT

The use of contextual information by leading universities

well and Will Craigie



# What is PARTNERS?

- Targeted supported entry route into Newcastle University
- The cornerstone of Newcastle University's work with under-represented groups
- Student life-cycle approach



# Enabling Access

- Over 4000 students have entered the University through this route
- Over 2000 applications to the PARTNERS Programme for 2017 entry
- 817 students attended the PARTNERS Summer School in 2017
- 59% of Newcastle University's WP new entrants participated in the PARTNERS Programme for 2017 entry



# Jade – Case Study

“The benefits of the programme didn’t just include the lower offer, but the opportunity to spend some time with the academics who gave us an insight of what learning at Newcastle University would be like.

When I began writing my first essay, after starting my course, I felt like I was miles ahead of everyone else as I’d already been taught how to reference and how to write in line with the expectations of my chosen discipline.

Jade – 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Politics and History student



# Supporting Success

- PARTNERS students progress well on their chosen courses and are significantly less likely than their counterparts to withdraw
- PARTNERS students perform slightly better than their counterparts in terms of degree outcomes



# Supporting Progression

- An increasing number of PARTNERS students entering graduate-level employment, however, still significantly lower than that of the wider University
- Careers Insights Programme
  - Building confidence
  - Range of work experience
  - Networking opportunities
  - Bursaries
- More PARTNERS graduates enter postgraduate study than the national average





# Manchester Access Programme (MAP)

MAP is a structured scheme for local post-16 students who meet specific academic and background criteria to support entry to Manchester, or to another research-intensive university



# Manchester Access Programme (MAP)

The scheme gives students the opportunity to show their potential through:

- a series of personal development/skills workshops;
- a two-day University Life Conference;
- completion of an academic assignment.

The benefits

- individual support through the UCAS application process;
- up to two A-level or equivalent grade reduction towards an offer for UG study at The University of Manchester;
- an Undergraduate Access Scholarship depending on their household income if they progress on to study at The University of Manchester.

# Impact

In 2015, we celebrated 10 years of the Manchester Access programme.....

**What does MAP Mean to You?**

[Click here to contribute to the Social Wall](#)

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**View the Case Studies**  
Explore

**What MAP means to me**  
[Share your story](#) [View Stories](#)



The University of Manchester

## Manchester Access Programme

Following expansion in 2013, around **500** students successfully complete MAP each year

And when they have completed University **over 90%** of MAP graduates are in a positive employment destination

**95%** of students who successfully complete MAP will make an application to Manchester – with around **75%** being made at least one offer

**29%** of MAP entrants to the University do not need the 2 A-level grade (or equivalent) reduction

Since 2005, **1,800** MAP students have successfully gained a place at The University of Manchester

MAP undergraduate entrants have a continuation rate of nearly **95%**

Typically **3/4** of our MAP undergraduates come from the lowest household incomes

**Impact**

# Impact

[The story of Scott](#), a former MAP student.

Scott Clayton completed MAP in 2010 before progressing in to the University to study Ancient History and Archaeology.

Throughout his studies at the University Scott was also a very active Student Ambassador, acting as a mentor to many MAP students and supporting them in their transition in to undergraduate study.



PARTNERS and MAP as case studies – similar opportunities available at other Russell Group universities, for example...



King's

Access to Birmingham (A2B)

Uni-Link

UCL

Nottingham Potential Summer School

Access to Leeds



Durham

The Liverpool Scholars Programme

# Discussion

