



Supporting super-curricular Learning

Martin Handley
(University of Oxford)

Coming up

- Extra-curricular vs super-curricular
- What is the Leaky Pipeline
- Discussing the 'P' word
- How can Oxford help?
- Other opportunities
- Oxford admissions process



Extra-curricular vs Super-curricular



Super-curricular

Firstly....

**Yes, it's a very
Oxbridge word but...**

**'super-curricular'
implies that ...**

**studying around your subject is
hugely beneficial to university
applications and beyond.**

The options

Extra-curricular

- Any activity that doesn't count towards academia.
- Outside of chosen topics, and unrelated to any studies.
- Examples would be sports, clubs, volunteering, *theatre*.
- Gives students the opportunity to unwind and relieve stresses.

25%

of young students have NO extra-curricular activities.

Super-curricular

- Educational activities which go beyond the school curriculum.
- The act of taking subjects studied further.
- Examples include podcasts, documentaries, trips to a museum, books, magazines, online programmes.

Some options



**Super-curricular
activities are not
mandatory but....**

Super-curricular activities can:

- Give a greater confidence in a subject.
- Aid in the development of new ideas and opinions.
- Improve critical thinking skills.
- Improve information gathering skills.



Super-curricular activities can:

- Help students make a competitive university application.
- Show that the student is serious about the study area.
- Enhance personal statements.
- Help with admission interviews.
- Prepare students for a challenging academic environment.



University Preference

Which student do you think a university would prefer for English?



Student A

- School Prefect
- Volunteers
- Enjoys reading
- Plays flute
- Enjoys the theatre



Student B

- Reads sport biographies
- Enjoys reading historical fiction
- Writes for the school newspaper

**Super-curricular
activities can
have a negative
impact if...**

Super-curricular can be negative if:

- Academic performance is compromised.
- Mental health is impacted.
- It creates resentment towards the subject.
- Adds to social isolation from peers or family.
- Creates financial pressure.



How to help

- No right or wrong resources to use.
- No single thing everyone reads or participates in.
- Any reading list is a suggestion not a requirement.
- The topic can build upon existing schoolwork.
- The topic can also be something completely new.
- Could a system be implemented in your school if it isn't already?

How to help -Example

Veterinary Medicine Suggestions

- Reading - Basic Science Concepts for Med/VetST Students
- Journals/Articles - New Scientist (Online or physical)
- Authors – Emma Milne (Vet and animal welfare enthusiast)
- Websites – BVA & I want to be a vet (Royal College of Veterinary)
- Video – Blue Planet & CountryFile
- Podcasts – BBC Radio 4 In Our Time & Alie Ward Ologies



June 18, 2025

Aquaculture Ecology
(SUSTAINABLE OCEAN
FOODS) with Dr. Ben Halpern

Make it easy!

Ask students to keep a journal and frequently refer and create logs of the following questions:

1. Why are you interested in this topic?
2. What new thing have you learnt?
2. What more you'd like to know about it?
3. Has your opinion changed or stayed the same?



The leaky --- pipeline



The Leaky Pipeline

Based on a research paper by:



Prof. Anna Vignoles.
Equity, value, and social
mobility in education.

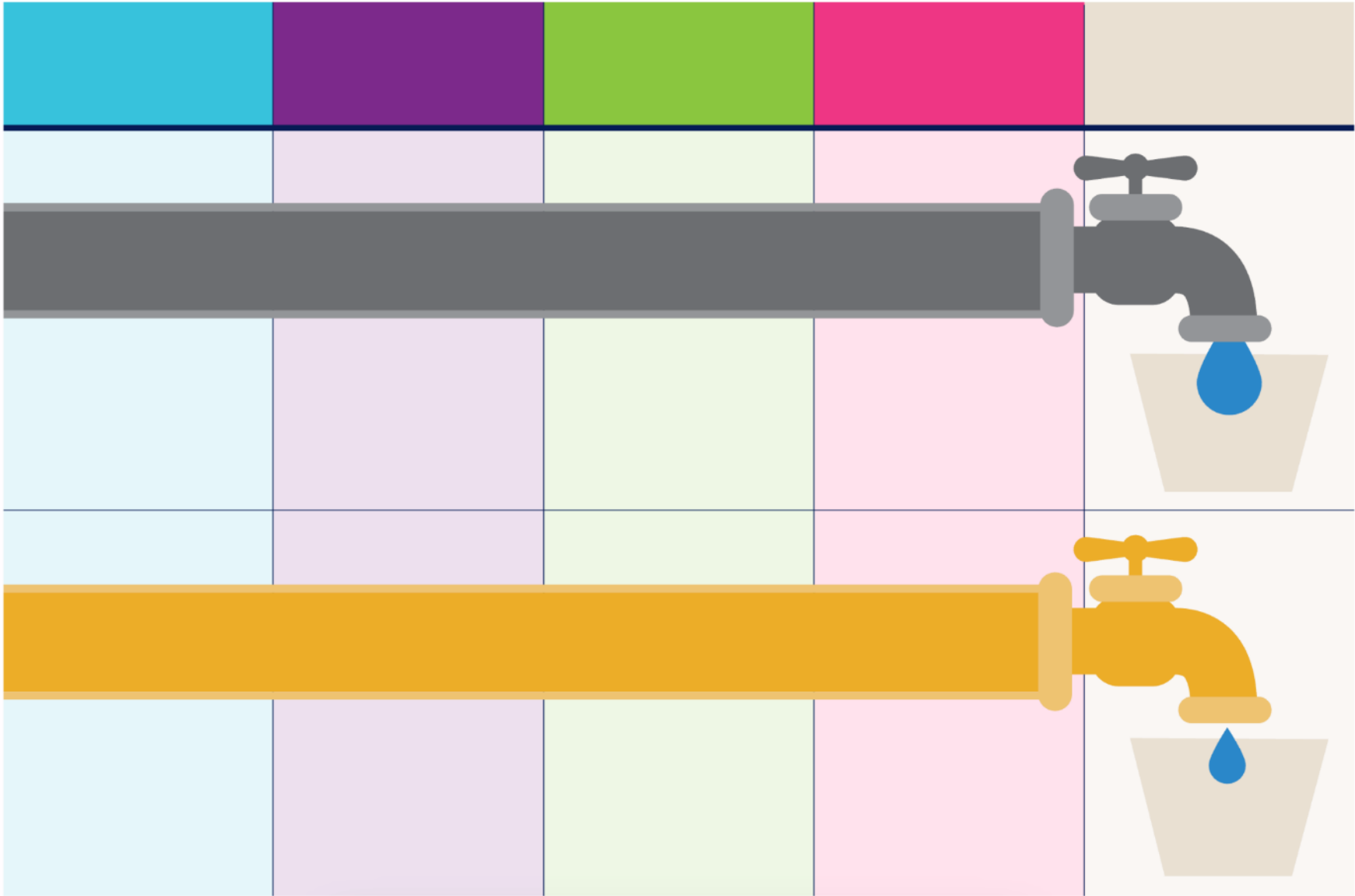


Dr Lindsey Macmillan.
Educational inequalities,
impact of selective
schooling



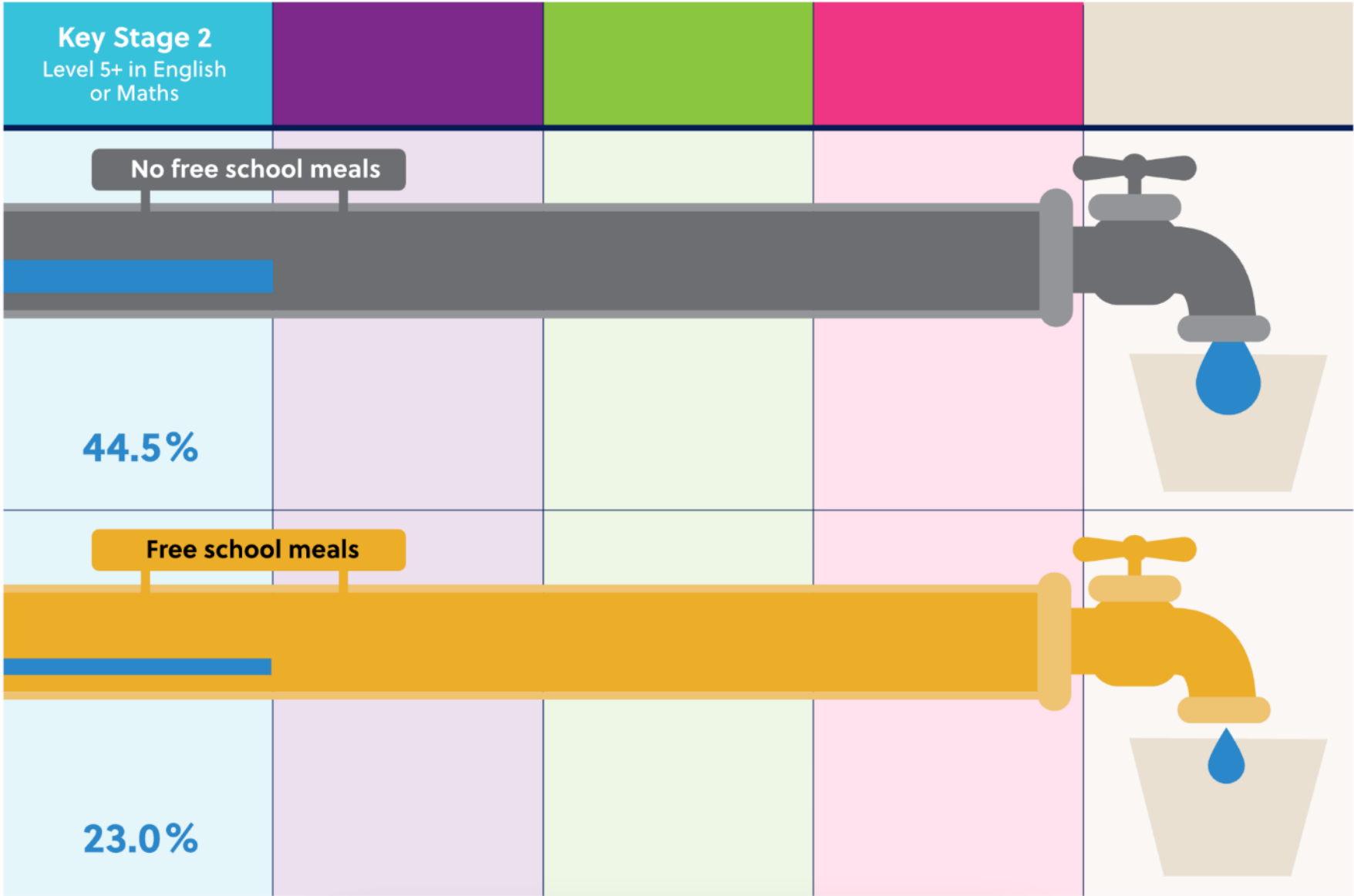
Prof. Claire Crawford
Developing policy to
reduce inequality gaps.

The Leaky Pipeline



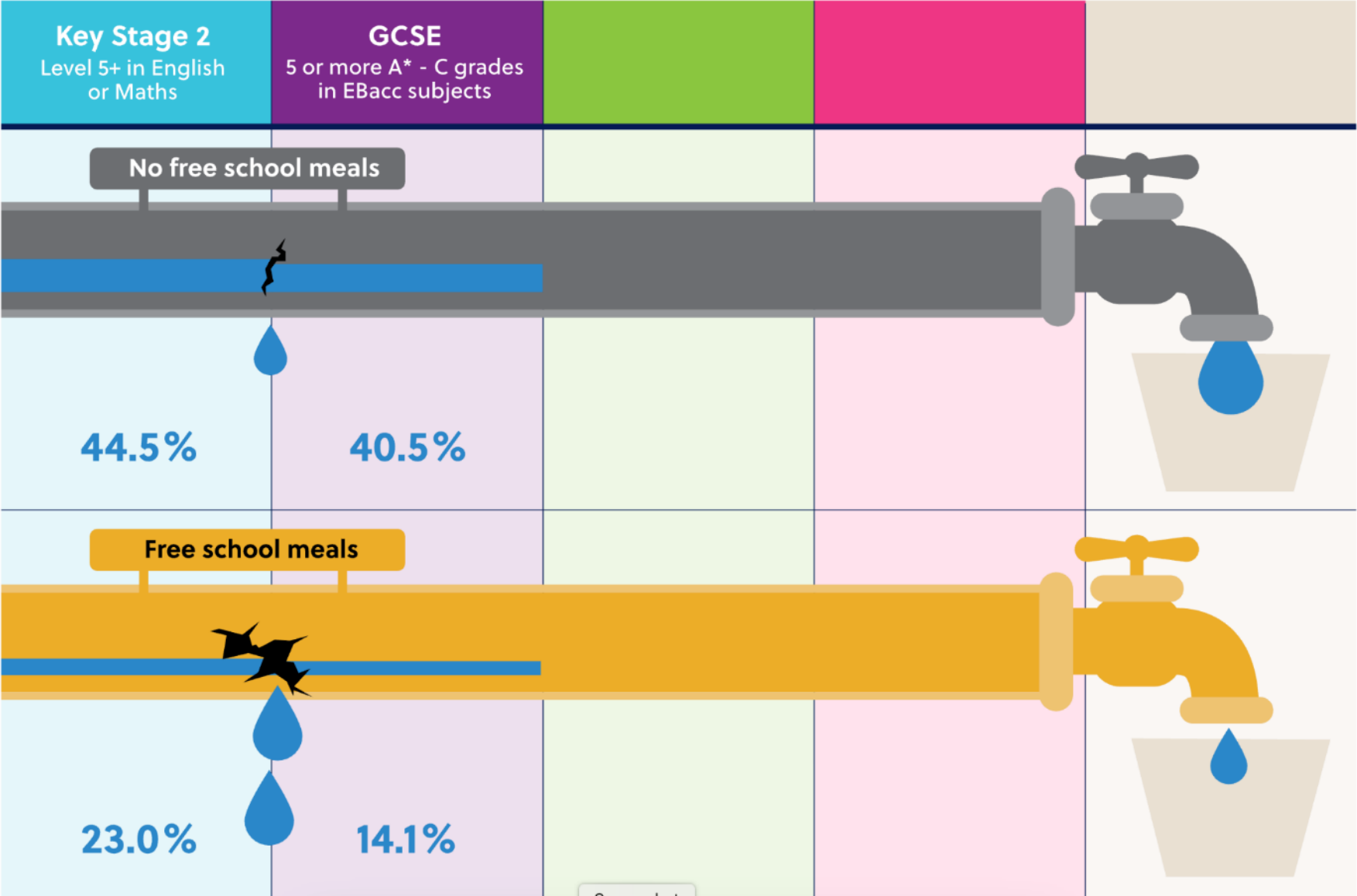
*520,000 young people

The Leaky Pipeline

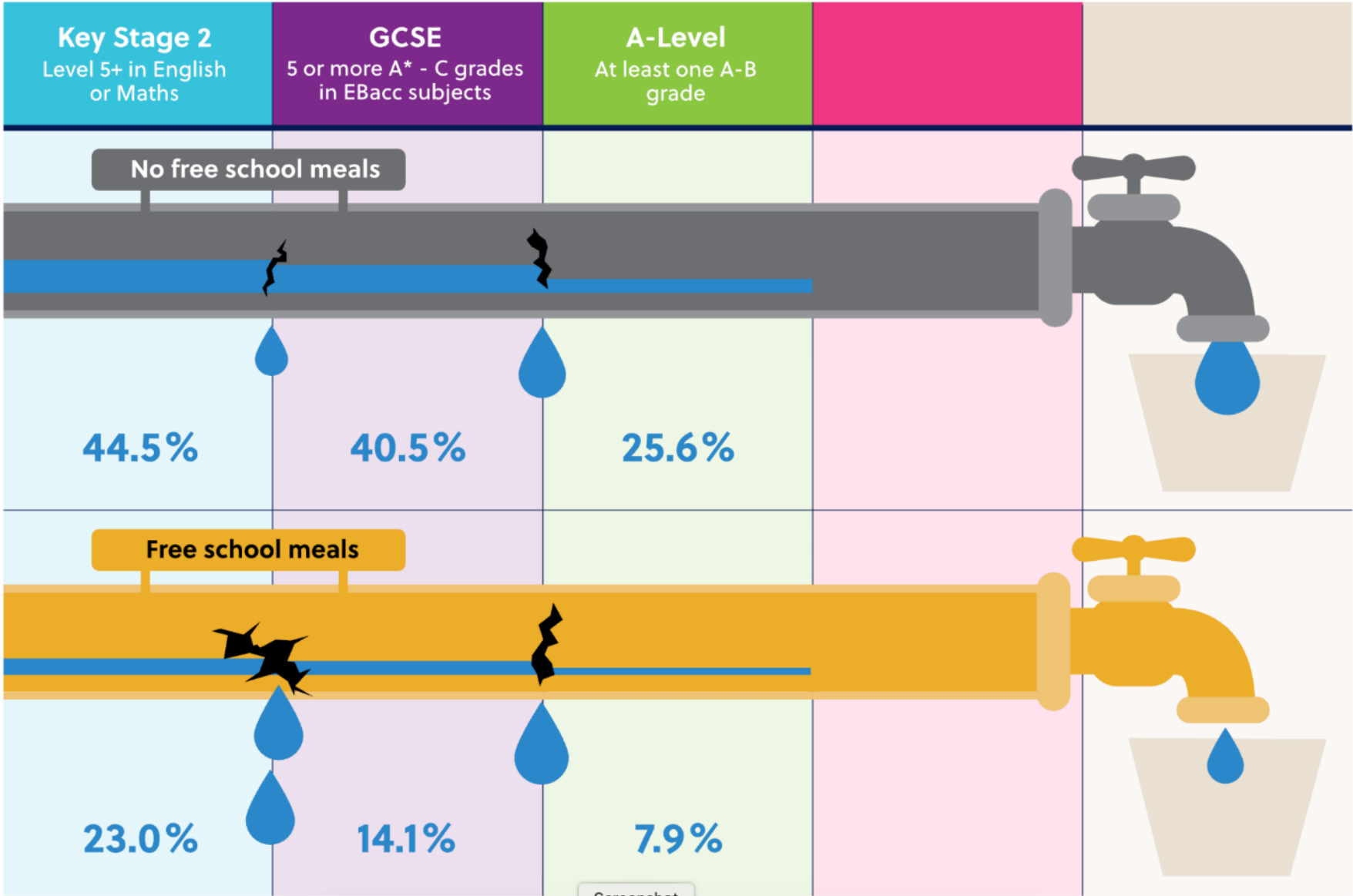


*520,000 young people

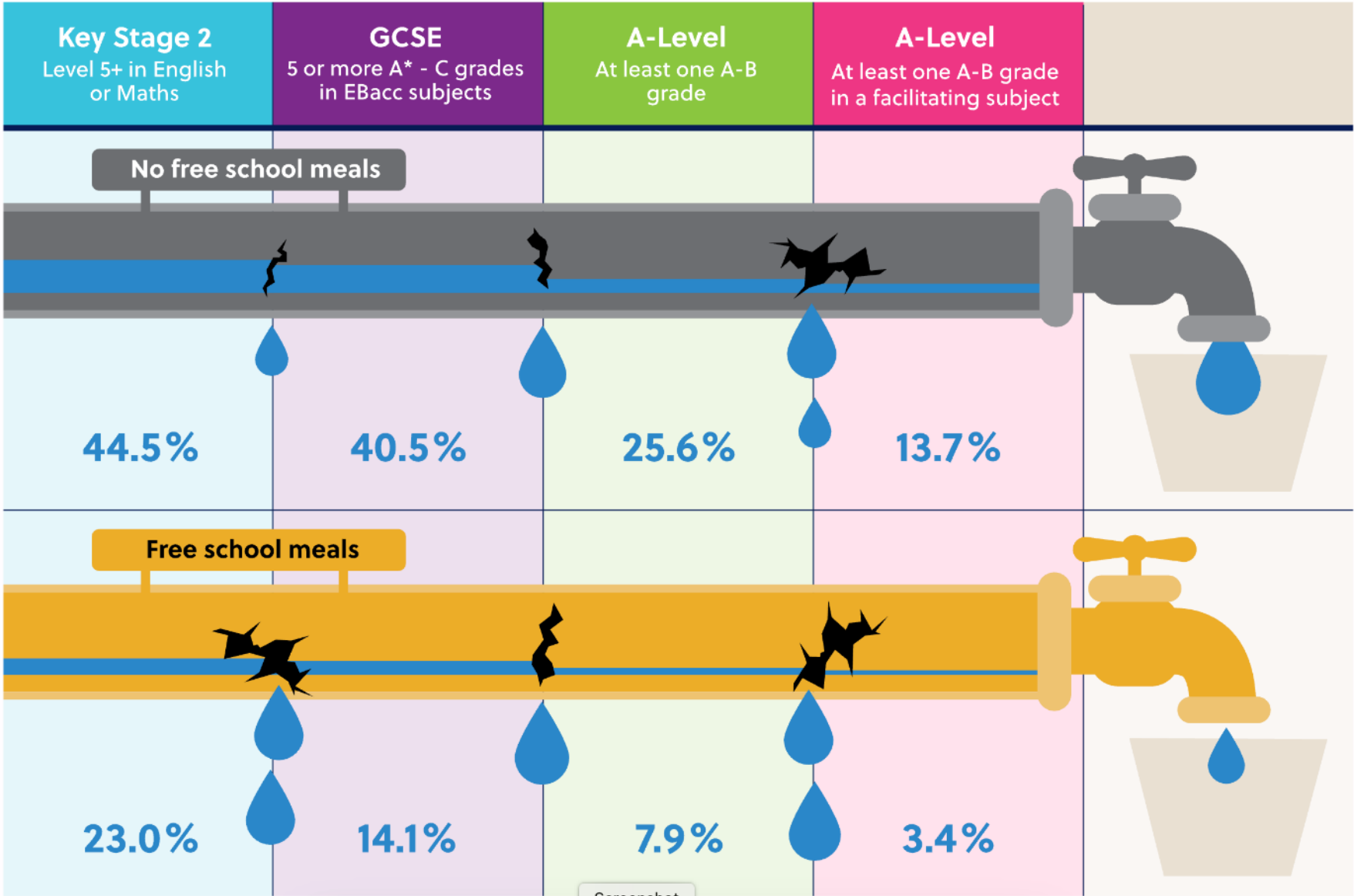
The Leaky Pipeline



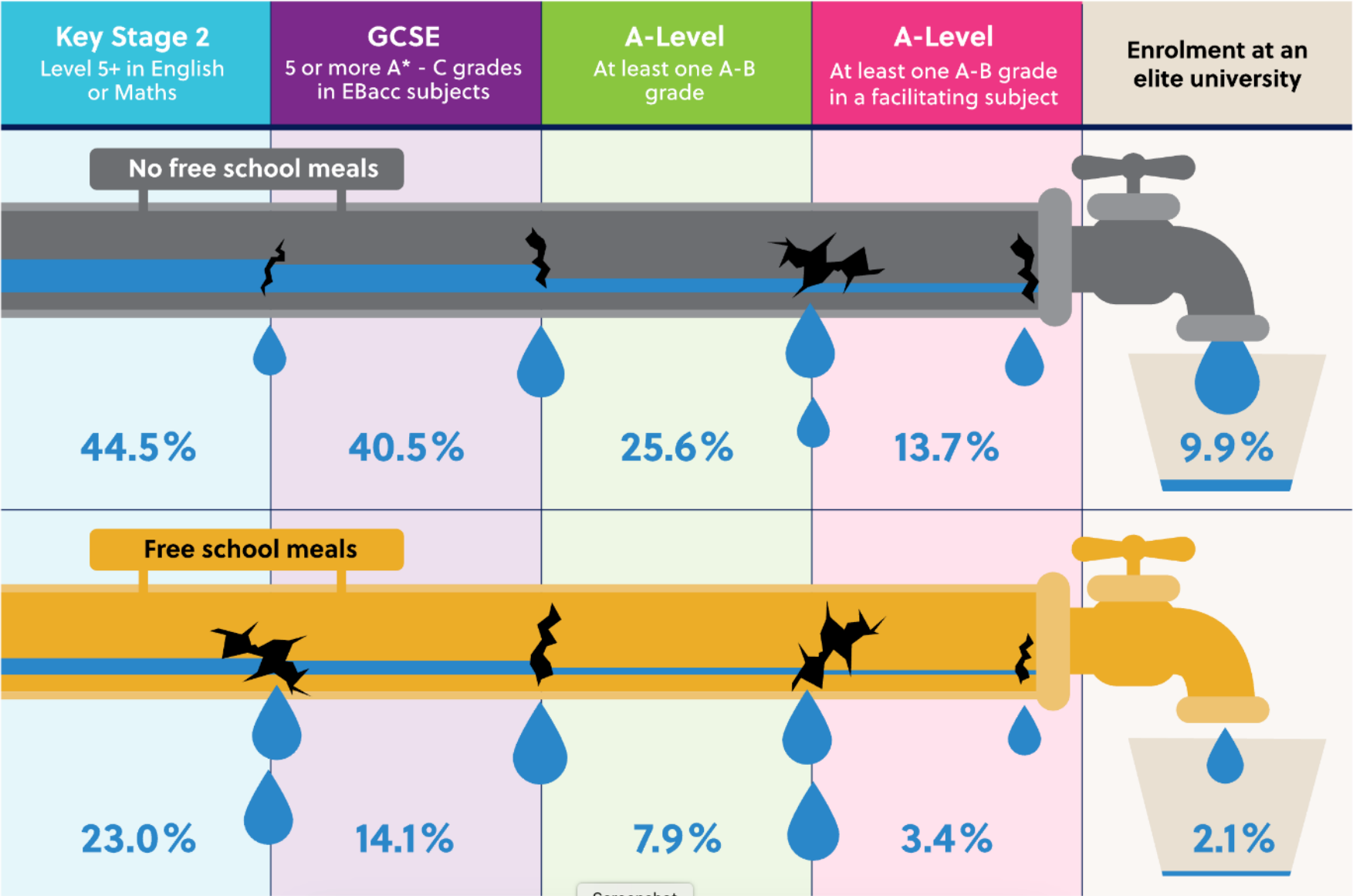
The Leaky Pipeline



The Leaky Pipeline



The Leaky Pipeline



Empowering every voice

- Level the playing field – equal participation for all
- Encourage open dialogue and constructive feedback
- Create a resource bank for students to access
- Promote wider – parents , communities, linked schools.
- Speak to students about what they think and feel they are good at.
- Look for new opportunities and update resources when you can
- Never 'cherry pick' students to apply to top universities.

The 'P' word



"You never
work a day in
your life"

Interviewer: Why do you want this job?
Me: I've always been passionate about
being able to afford food



Why it makes no sense

- Passion is a 'strong and barely controllable emotion'
- Just because you're passionate about something doesn't mean you're good at it.
- Doing something you're good at creates a better reward loop
- Your interests are likely to change with age.
- If you are not making enough money to have the basics - you are not going to be happy.
- Economic security provides you with opportunities and meaningful rewards outside of work (education, hobbies, travel)

Did you know

2%

of actors have enough stable work for a basic annual salary



0.007%

Chance of becoming an astronaut



<1%

of Youtubers make enough to reach the US poverty line.



4%

of flight school students make it to commercial airline pilot status.

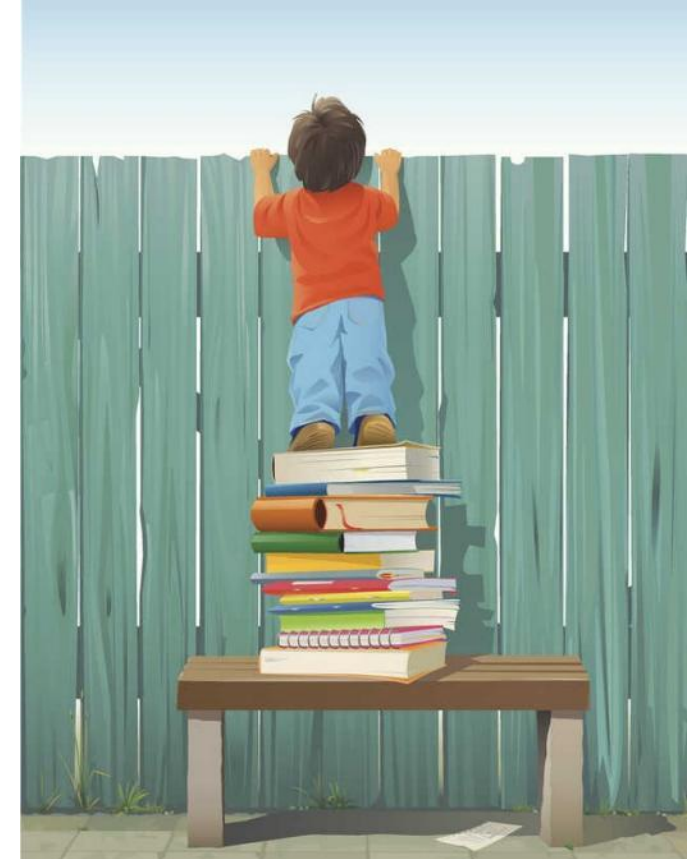
Top job choices

SECONDARY SCHOOL	SPORTS 24%	MEDIA 19%	BEAUTY 14%
DURING GCSEs	CREATIVE 17%	HEALTHCARE 14%	BUSINESS 13%
Post University	FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING	HEALTHCARE	IT, DATA SCIENCE AND AI

Future Skills Questionnaire 2023/24 (230,000 students)

Replacement words

- Curious/Curiosity: Wanting to learn and explore more, trying new things.
- Motivate/motivated: A reason for doing something, a willingness to learn
- Interest/interested: Sustained engagement, to learn and understand more.



How can --- Oxford help?



How can Oxford help



How can Oxford help

Astrophoria Foundation Year

- For UK state school students who have high academic potential but have experienced severe personal disadvantage or disrupted education.
- Those offered places take part in a free, fully-funded, year-long bespoke subject-specific course at Oxford.
- Accommodation will be provided free of charge.
- Students will not have to pay course fees and will receive a non-repayable bursary to cover living costs.
- Up to 50 places will be offered on the programme each year.

How can Oxford help

Opportunity Oxford

- Aimed to increase the number of high-achieving students admitted to Oxford from key backgrounds.
- A combination of online events, an academic course and a residential programme.
- Designed to explore, develop and equip students with core academic skills for their future degrees.
- Ensures they are fully prepared to thrive from day one.
- Around 500 offer holders take part each year.

Other --- Opportunities



Other Opportunities

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY



University of
Sheffield



UK
Parliament



UK Maths Trust



**Make ALL your students
aware of these
opportunities!**

Oxford admissions



- This year the UCAS deadline is 6pm on Wednesday 15 October.
- NEW - Personal statement format has changed.
3 Questions – Why, How and What.
- All admissions tests will be taken on a computer and delivered online.
- No charge for candidates to register for Oxford's own tests.
- Tests will take place between 21-27 October.
- Must have started their UCAS application and have a valid UCAS ID when registering for a test.
- Registration window via the registration portal for all Oxford tests:
18 June – 19 September.
- Booking window for all registered candidates for Oxford tests:
18 August – 26 September

Oxford Admissions 2025

- Medicine - Pearson VUE UCAT.
- Law – Pearson VUE LNAT.
- Any History course – HAT no longer taken.

- AHCAAT - Classical Archaeology and Ancient History.
- BMSAT - Biomedical Sciences.
- CAT - Classics, Classics and English, Classics and ML, Classics and AMES.
- MAT – Any Computer Science or Mathematics course.
- MLAT - Any course with modern languages.
- PAT - Engineering Science, Materials Science, Physics, Physics and Philosophy.
- PhilAT - Philosophy and Theology.
- TSA - Economics and Management, Experimental Psychology, History and Economics, PPL.

When applying we look at

- The applicant's school.
- The applicant's neighbourhood.
- Any experience in the care system.
- Eligibility for FSM since age 11.
- Additional WP information.



Questions?



