

Levelling up: Tackling regional and other inequalities in higher education

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Who we are



Independent hub for higher education professionals to access research, toolkits, evaluation techniques and more to help widen participation and improve equality within the sector.



Set up by a consortium of King's College London, Nottingham Trent University and the Behavioural Insights Team.

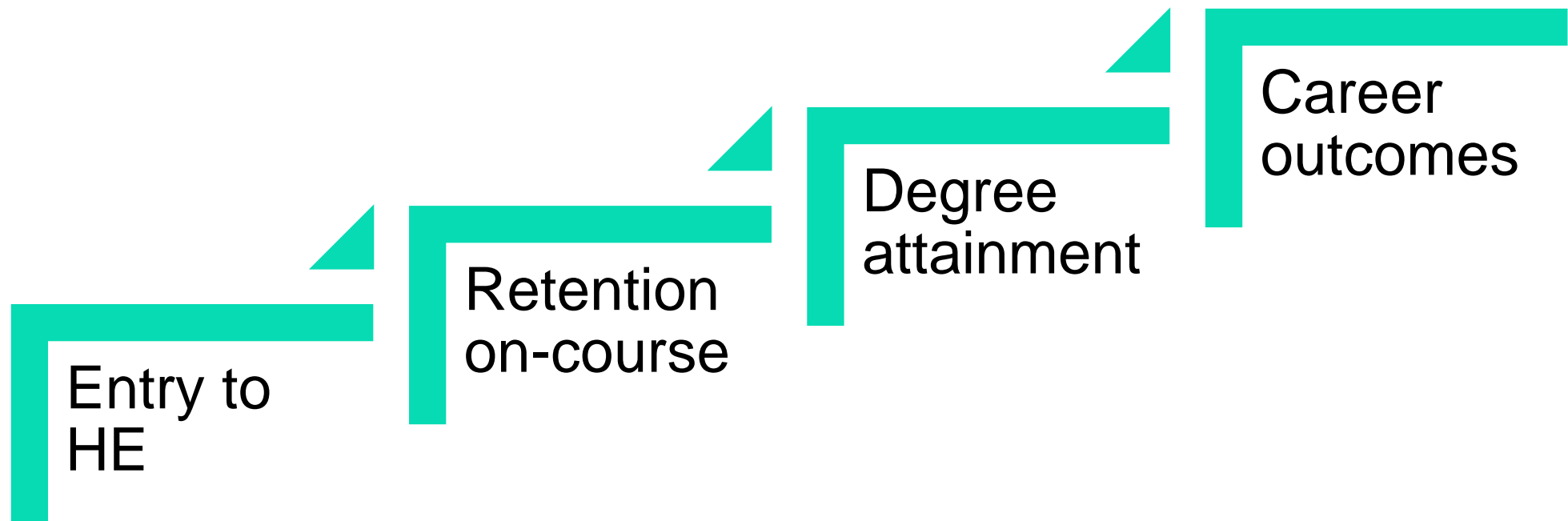


An affiliate What Works Centre, and part of the UK Government's What Works Movement.



Funded by the Office for Students from 2019 to 2022.

Equality gaps: outcomes



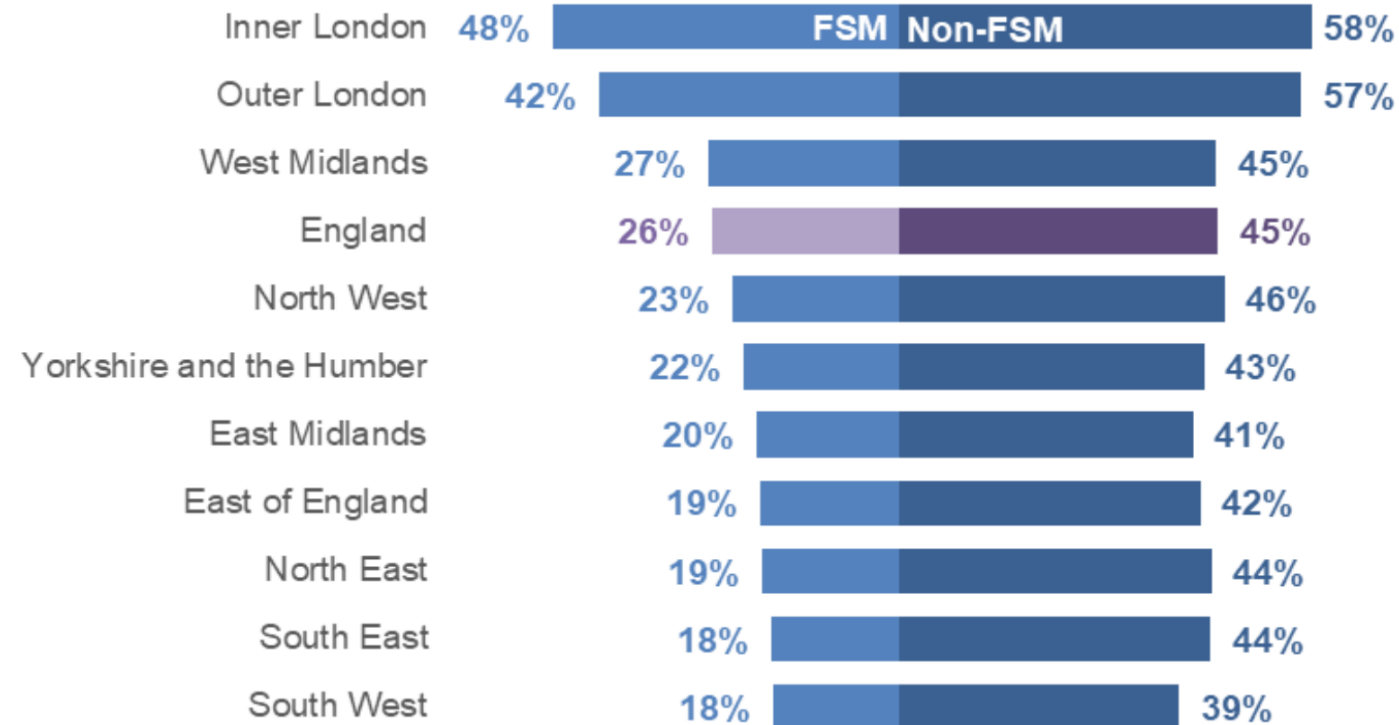
Area inequalities in higher education

- Large gaps between different regions
- Although London is far ahead of all regions
- Within-region gaps are even more striking
- E.g. the difference between FSM and non-FSM students at LA level: Wokingham and Reading the highest at 35%; Bracknell Forest and Hampshire with lowest FSM participation rates
- Even more striking at constituency or super-output area: all postcodes in lowest participation areas (though e.g. Nottingham North and Great Yarmouth do vary)

Figure 3: Percentage of 15 year old state-funded and special school pupils who entered HE by age 19 by region and Free School Meal status

Academic Year 2017/18

UK Higher Education Providers and English Further Education Colleges



HE equality gaps and economic performance

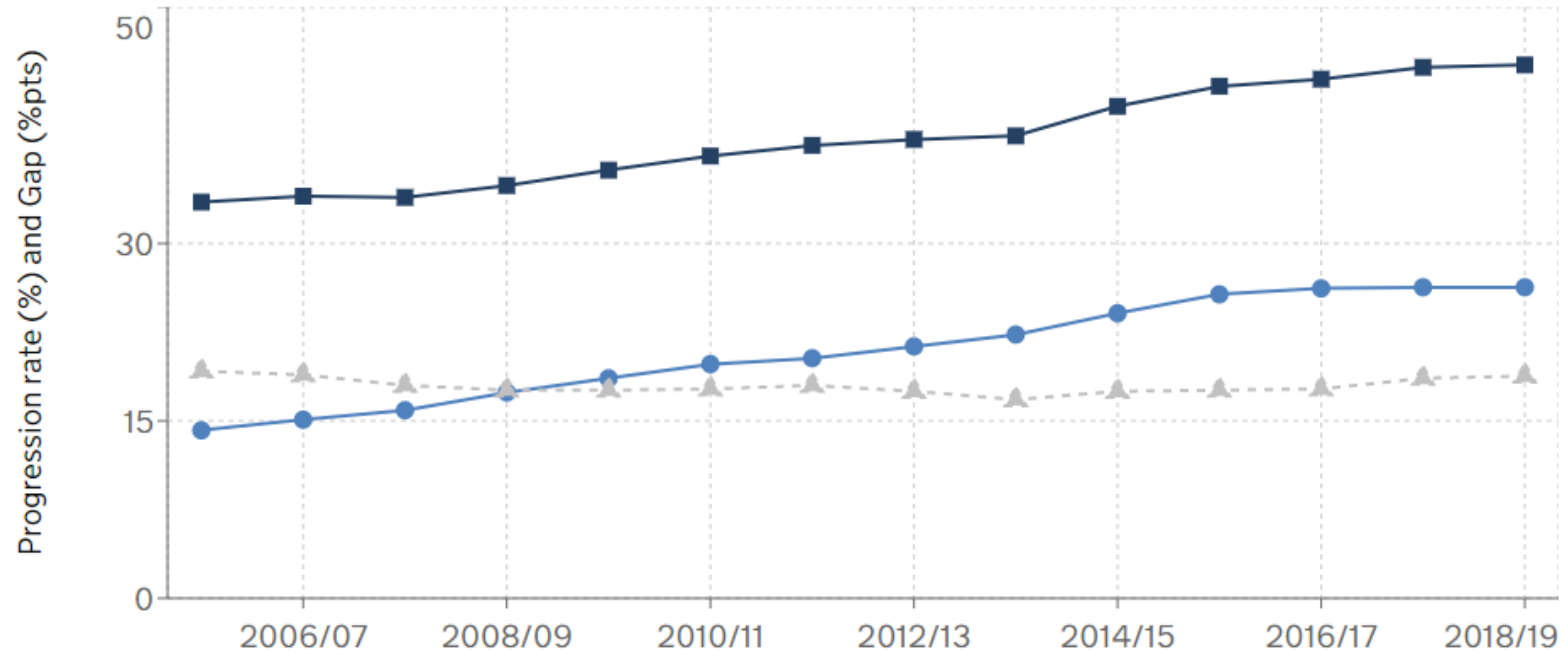
- Correlation between low HE participation areas and low economic performance
- But not perfect correlation
- Question of policy intervention: tackle the regional economic inequalities or lower economic performance
- Or focus on boosting skills and qualifications regionally/locally
- Other major questions around the right unit or area of intervention, e.g. cities, towns or regions

What does this mean for levelling up

- Low HE participation areas correlate somewhat with lower economic performance
- Both/and: investing in local economies; and tackling neighbourhood or local HE participation
- But... one won't necessarily follow the other (e.g. increased number of people with qualifications in an area won't necessarily lead to better labour market outcomes if local economic opportunities remain weak)
- There are existing links and interventions between local areas and HE providers, especially in terms of sandwich degrees and placements (though less causal evidence)
- Important to remember tackling regional inequalities doesn't necessarily address other forms of inequality (individual-level can still remain)
- These include FSM-nonFSM, but also class, race, disability, care leavers, mature learners
- While need to address all these inequalities, need also to recognise that causes – and solutions – may vary.

Equality gaps - access

Progression to HE by age 19 by Free School Meal Status



- HE Progression Rate (FSM) (England)
- ▲ Progression Rate Gap (England)
- HE Progression Rate (Non-FSM) (England)

Equality gaps – post-entry

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS QUALIFYING WITH A FIRST- OR UPPER-SECOND-CLASS DEGREES, BY ETHNICITY AND ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS IN ENGLAND

