

Office for
Students

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Fair access to English HE in the 21st century: a story in 5 parts

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A story in 5 parts

2000-06: increasing places

Setting

2006-12: building pathways

Character

2012-18: unlocking demand

Conflict

2018-21: regulating outcomes

Plot

2021-25: levelling up

Theme

Part 1: – widening participation

‘A society that is open and ***genuinely based on merit*** and the equal worth of all....I want to achieve a university participation rate of over 50 per cent among the under-30s... ***There will be no quotas; no lowering of entry standards. It is a strictly meritocratic programme.*** But its purpose is to say...your background shouldn't hold you back; if you have the ability, you can get the university place.’

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2001

Part 2: building pathways

2004 White Paper

- restoring **grants for students from lower income families** and abolishing up-front fees for all;
- appointing **an independent Access Regulator** to oversee access agreements
- reforming funding so that universities and colleges will be **properly reimbursed for extra costs** in attracting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds
- continuing to increase participation **mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees**;
- **strengthening links between further and higher education**
- encouraging more **flexibility in courses**, to meet the needs of a more diverse student body

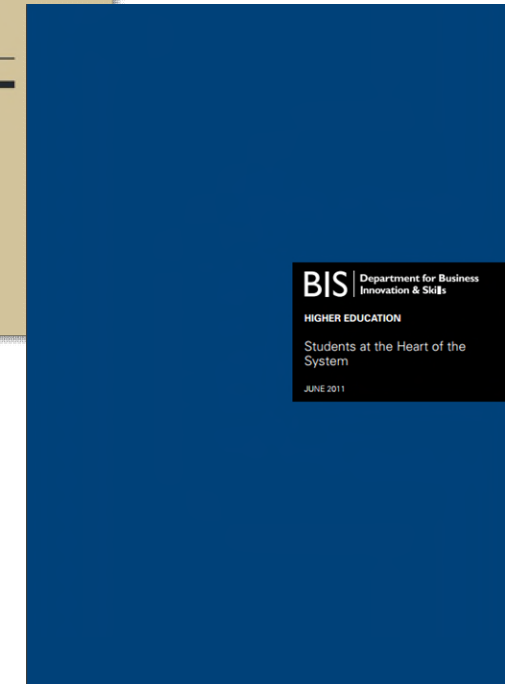
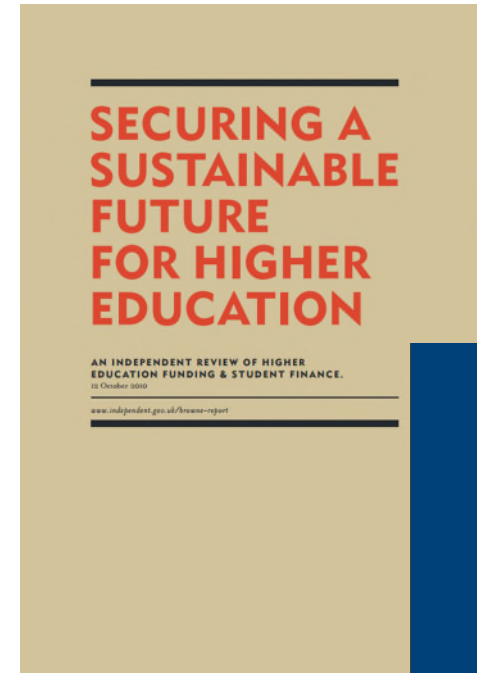
2006 Schwartz Review of Admissions

- a fair admissions system provides **equal opportunity** for all individuals, regardless of background
- it is fair and appropriate to **consider contextual factors as well as formal educational achievement**, given the variation in learners' opportunities and circumstances
- apply holistic assessment to **borderline applicants and applicants for over-subscribed courses**

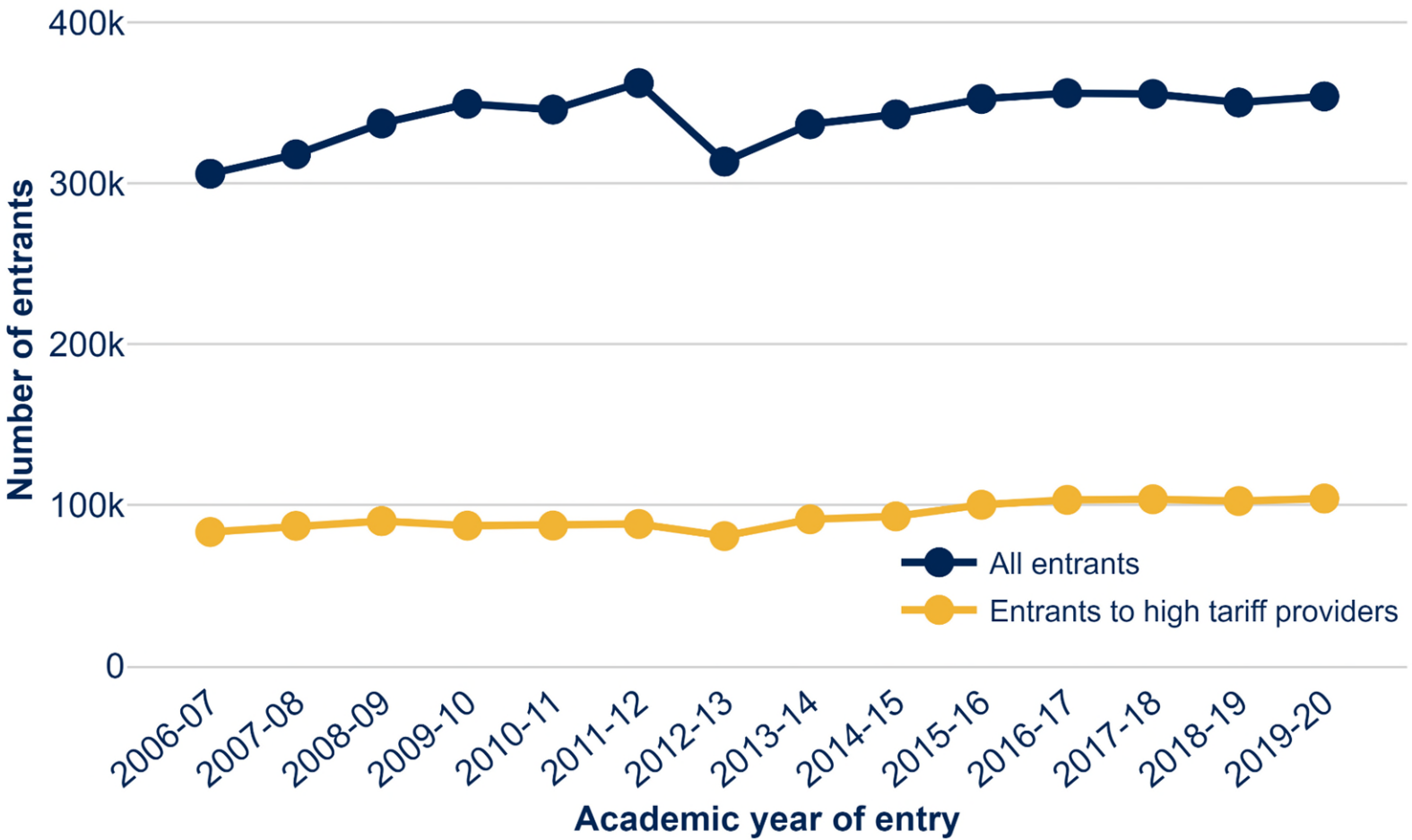
Part 3: unlocking demand

2011 White Paper

- A ***graduate contribution system***
- Potential monetisation of the student loan book
- ***Better information for students***
- A better student experience
- ***A diverse and responsive sector***
- ***A strengthened Office for Fair Access***
- National Scholarship Programme

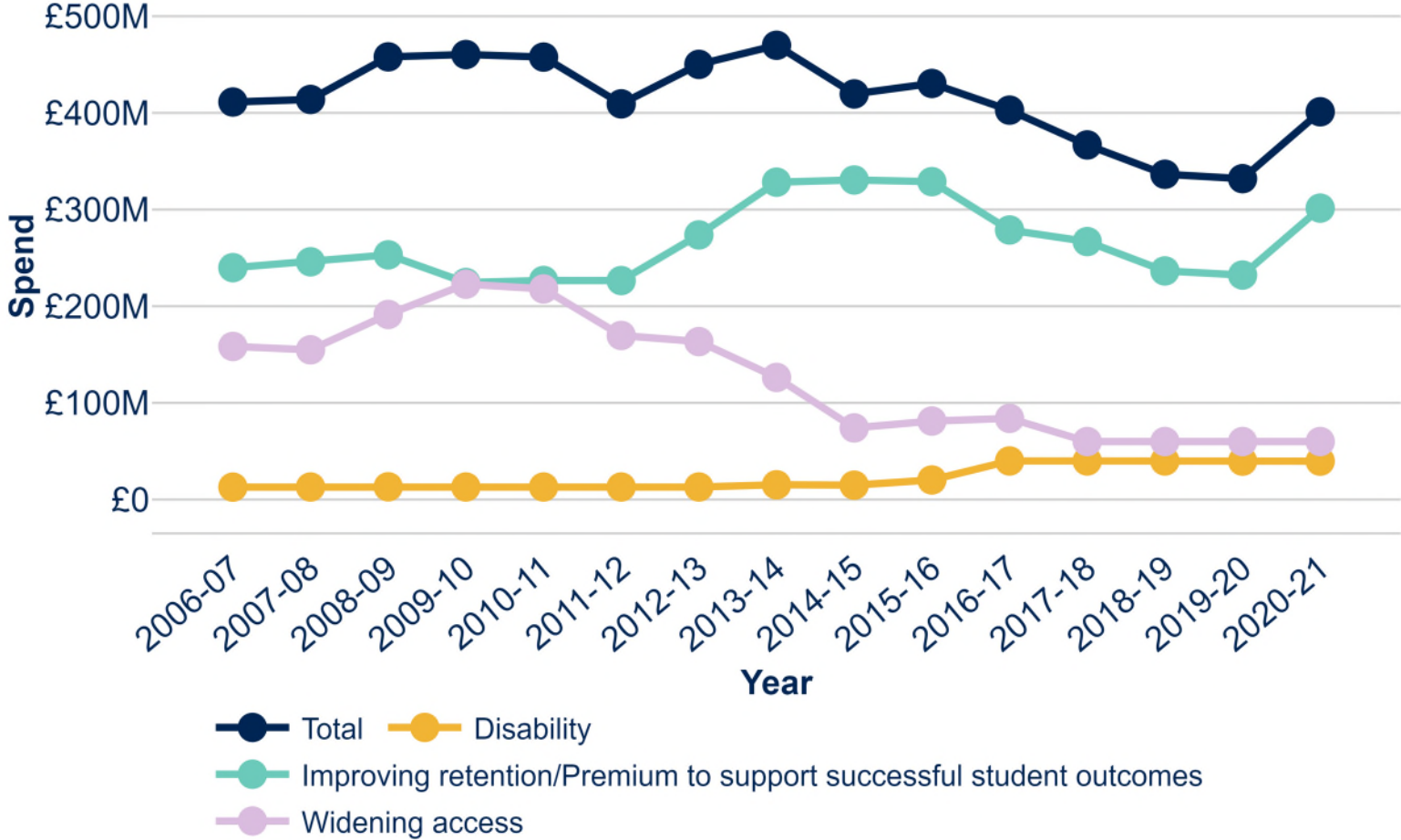


UK-domiciled young entrants since 2006-07



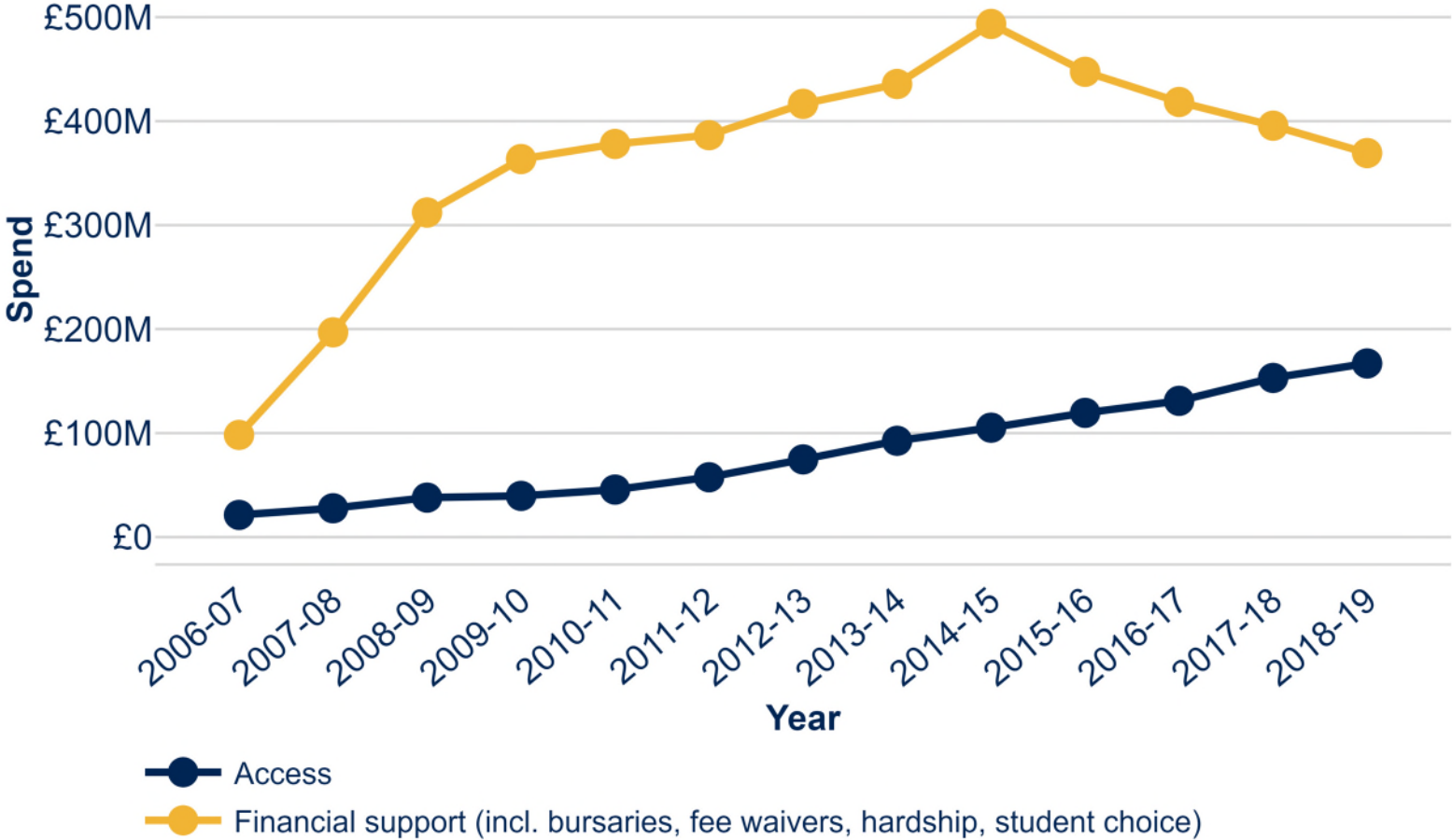
Source: OfS analysis of HESA data, UK institutions

Funding to universities and colleges for WP and Fair Access since 2006-07



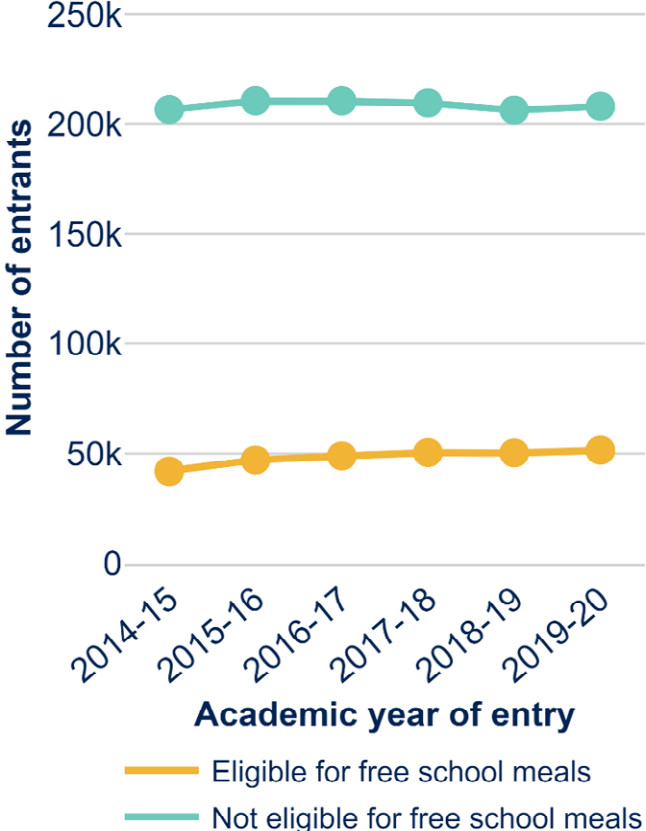
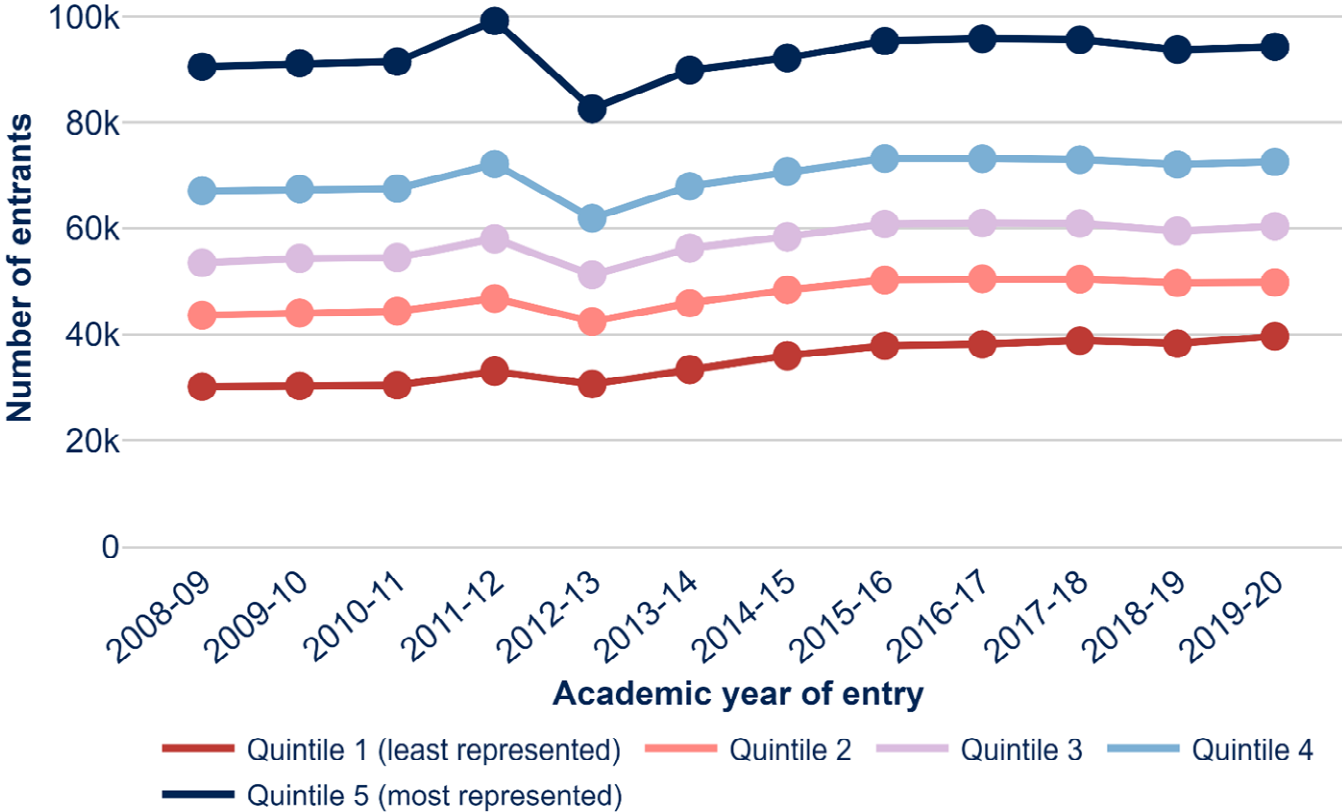
Source: Hefce and OfS data, published each year.

Investment by universities and colleges in WP and Fair Access since 2006-07



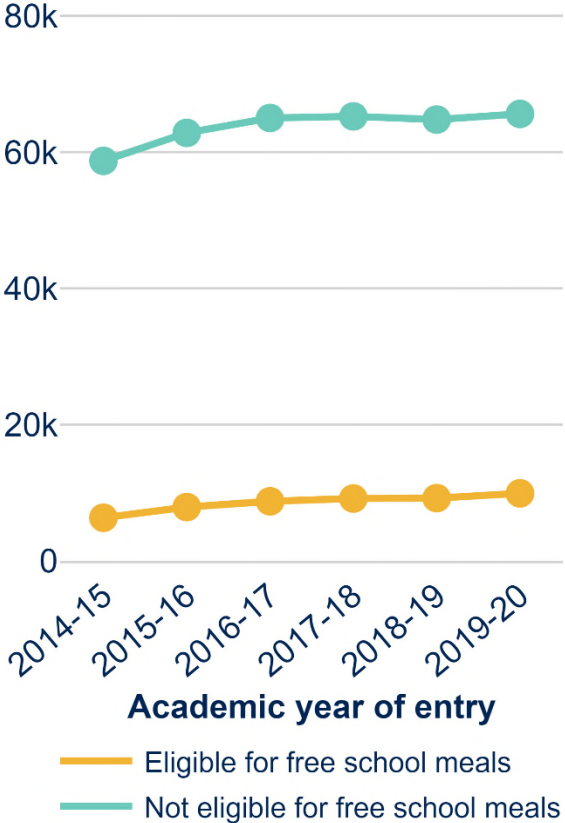
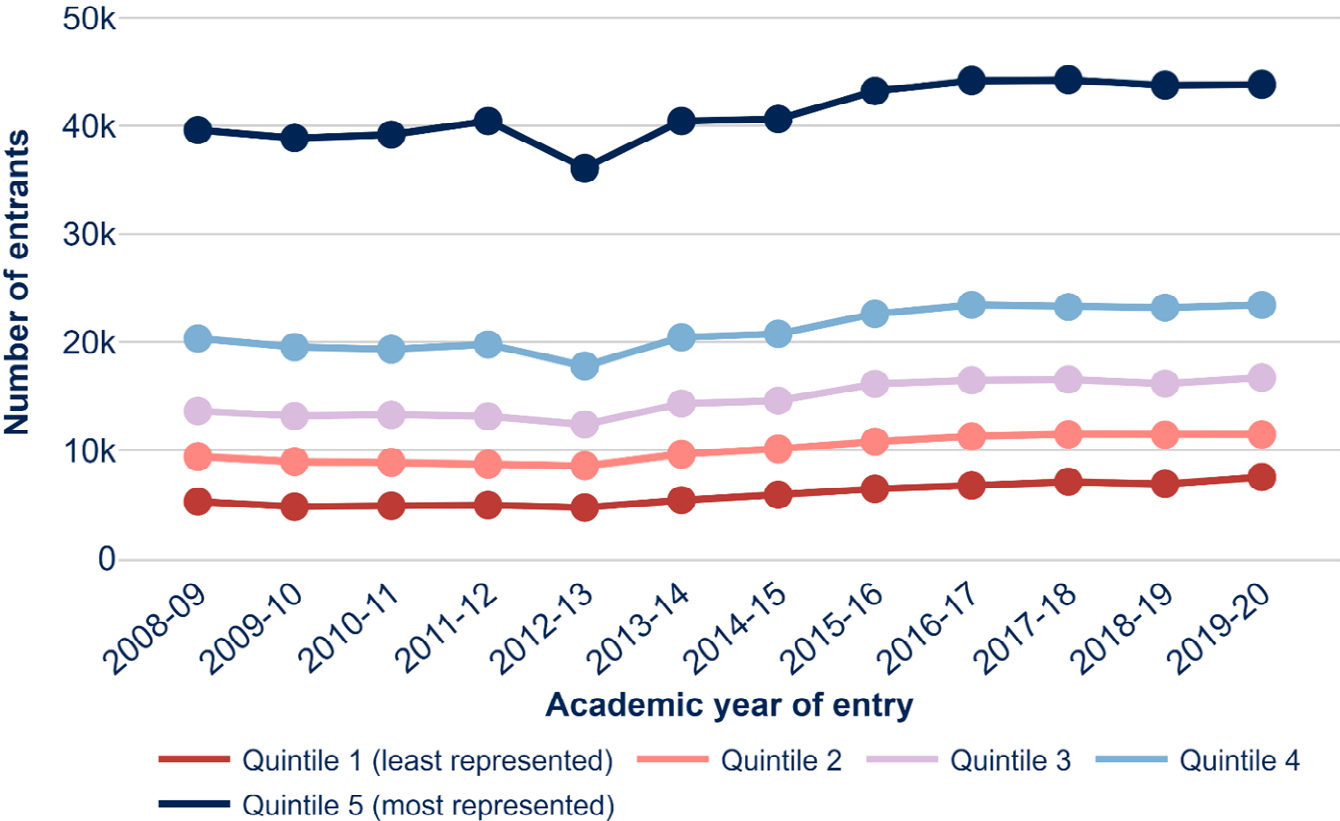
Source: OFFA access agreements and associated monitoring 2006-08 to 2018-19.

Entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4) or eligible for free school meals



Source: OfS analysis of NPD, HESA and ILR, English institutions. Young students only (under 21). Data on free school meal eligibility is only available from 2014-15 onwards.

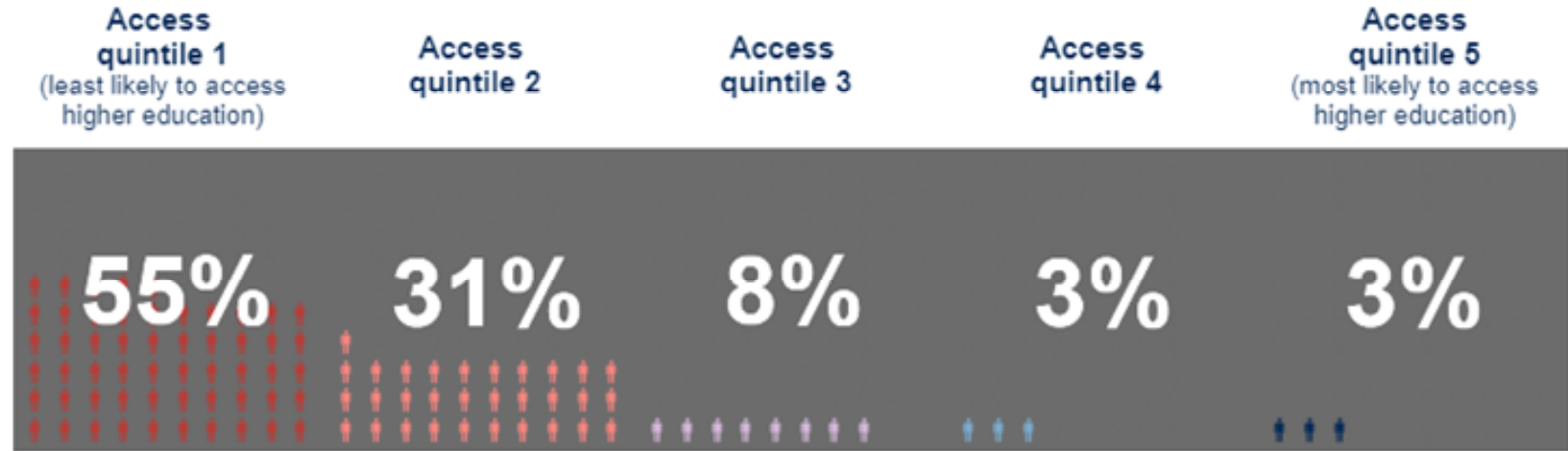
Entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4) or eligible for free school meals – high tariff providers only



Source: OfS analysis of NPD, HESA and ILR data, English institutions. Young students only. Data on free school meal availability is only available for entrants from 2014-15 onwards. For more information on how high-tariff providers are defined, see Annex E on this page: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/asures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-at-higher-tariff-providers-between-the-most-and-least-represented-groups/>

Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) Access

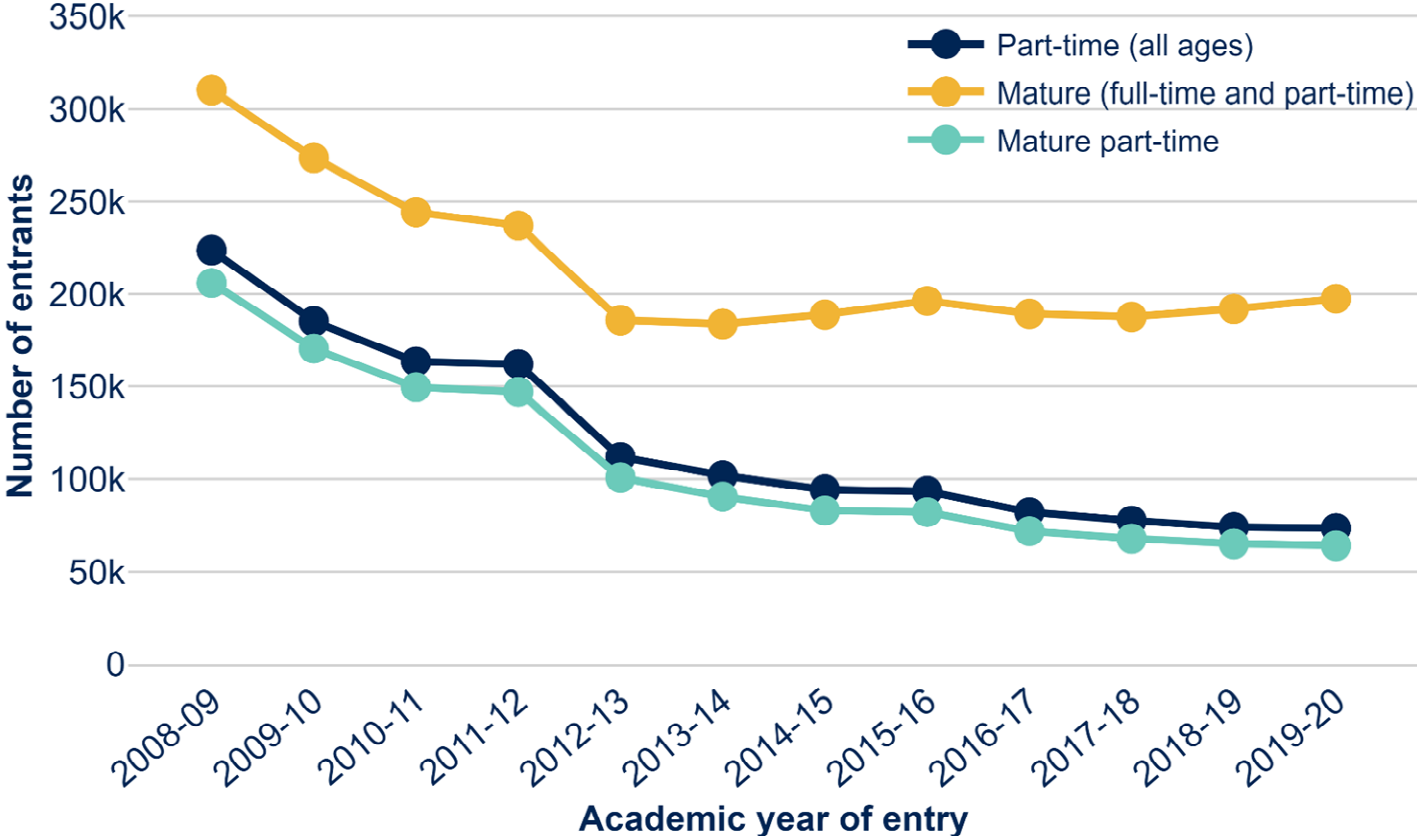
55% of young people from areas in POLAR4 quintile 1 were in the group least likely to access HE



This increases to 90% for those from quintile 1 areas who were eligible for free school meals

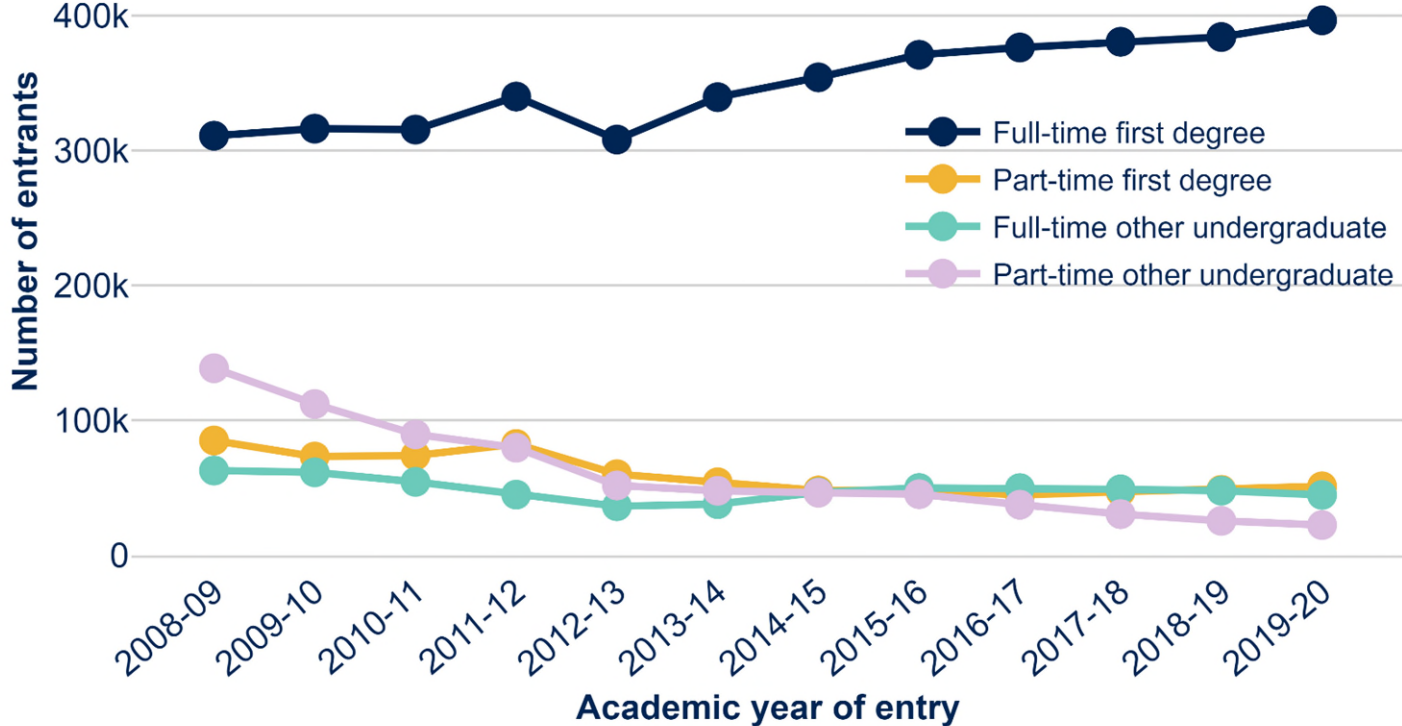


Mature student numbers since 2008-09



Source: OfS analysis of HESA and ILR data

Level of undergraduate study since 2006-07



Source: OfS analysis of HESA and ILR data. Note that in this chart any undergraduate courses with a postgraduate component have been included with the first degree courses.

Part 4: regulating providers

Higher Education and Research Act 2017

- (a) protect the institutional autonomy of English HE providers
- (b) promote quality, and greater choice and opportunities for students, in the provision of HE
- (c) encourage competition between English HE providers in connection with the provision of HE where that competition is in the interests of students and employers, while also having regard to the benefits for students and employers resulting from collaboration between such providers
- (d) promote value for money in the provision of HE
- (e) *promote equality of opportunity in connection with access to and participation in HE***

‘We want to ensure in bringing forward our reforms that higher education providers do not lose sight of their ***vital role in promoting social mobility and in helping some of the most disadvantaged young people in our society to benefit from our world-class higher education system.*** The integration of the remit of the director of fair access into the OFS signals ***our commitment to making fair access and participation a priority.*** The OFS will have a new duty requiring it to consider equality of opportunity in connection with access and participation across all its functions, so widening access and participation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds truly will be at its very core.’

Minister for Universities & Skills Jo Johnson, Public Bill Committee, September 2016

The Office for Students

‘Our regulatory framework enables the Director for Fair Access and Participation to develop a bold new approach to supporting social mobility, and equality and diversity, through higher education. ...We will be radical and ambitious to make sure we deliver on the promise of higher education as an engine for social mobility, and a gateway to a better life for those who undertake it.’

OfS Chair Michael Barber, 2018



Part 5: levelling up

‘I love our universities, and it is one of this country’s great achievements massively to have expanded higher education. But we also need to recognise that ***a significant and growing minority of young people leave university and work in a non-graduate job***, and end up wondering whether they did the right thing. Was it sensible to rack up that debt on that degree? ***Were they ever given the choice to look at the more practical options, the courses – just as stimulating - that lead more directly to well-paid jobs?*** We seem on the one hand to have too few of the right skills for the jobs our economy creates, and on the other hand too many graduates with degrees which don’t get them the jobs that they want. And the truth is ***we’re not giving anywhere near enough of the right kind of training or support to the fifty per cent of young people who don’t want to go to university***, and so we’re depriving them of the chance to find their vocation and develop a fulfilling, well-paid career.’

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, 2020

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