

# Widening participation

March 2016

Supported by



- Government has set an ambition to double the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds going into higher education. Background for this purpose refers to the neighbourhood where the young person is living. This is known as the POLAR3 measure and the Government's ambition relates to young people living in the poorest 20% of POLAR3 areas. The baseline year is 2009/10.
- There is a second ambition to increase by 20% the numbers of students from BME backgrounds.
- The aim of our analysis is to inform debate and action primarily about the first of these ambitions though we touch on the second one at the end of this paper.
- We start by observing what further progress on widening participation would be needed to achieve the first ambition.
- Then we look at the progress on widening participation that has already been made. We show differences by type of student (full time, part time, mature); and the variation across the sector.
- Finally, we consider the issues that government, institutions and others in education may need to tackle if the ambition is to be achieved.
- This work has been supported by University Alliance and Open University though the SMF is responsible for the analysis and any policy implications drawn from it.

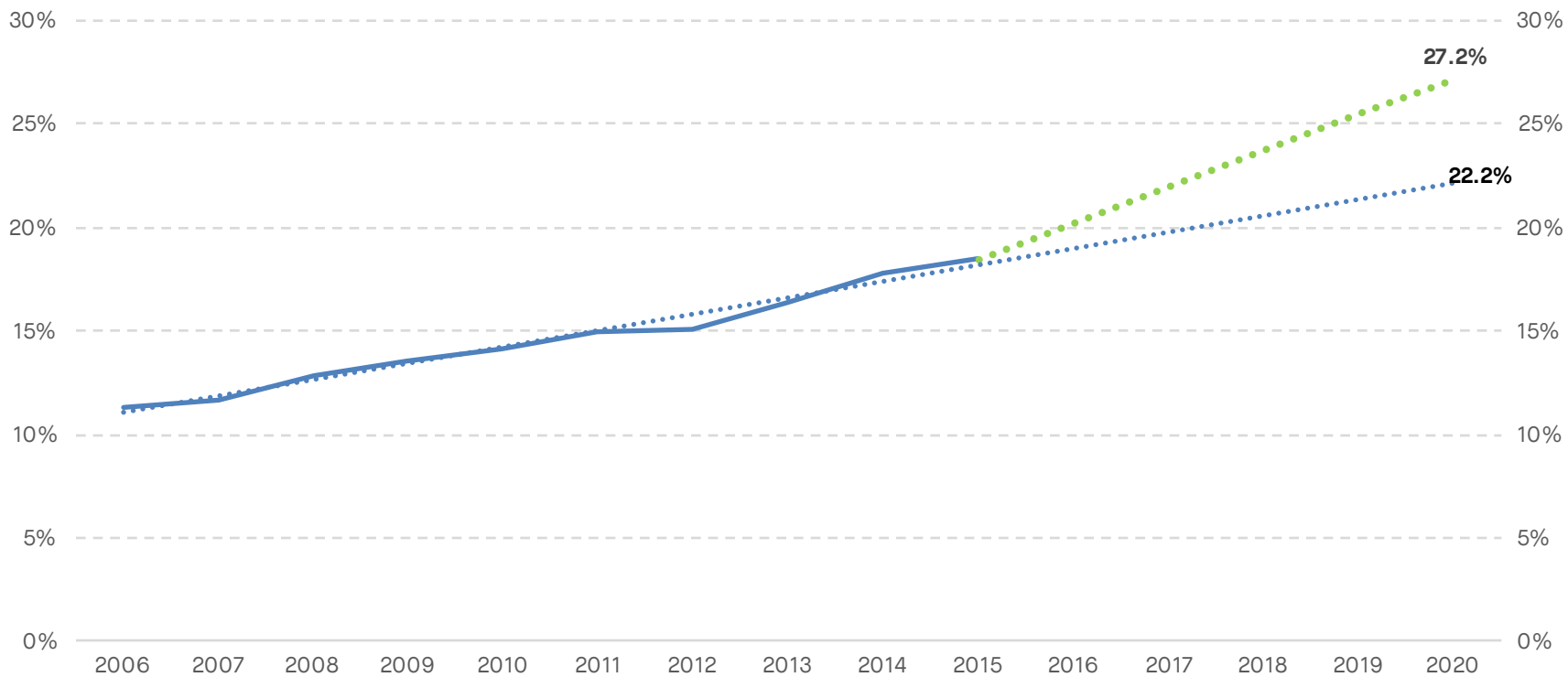
# Steady progress on widening participation – but long way to go in order to achieve ambition

## University entry rates for young people living in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in England

Solid blue line: actual university entry

Dotted blue line: projected trend based on average

Dotted green line: required trend for achieving Government ambition



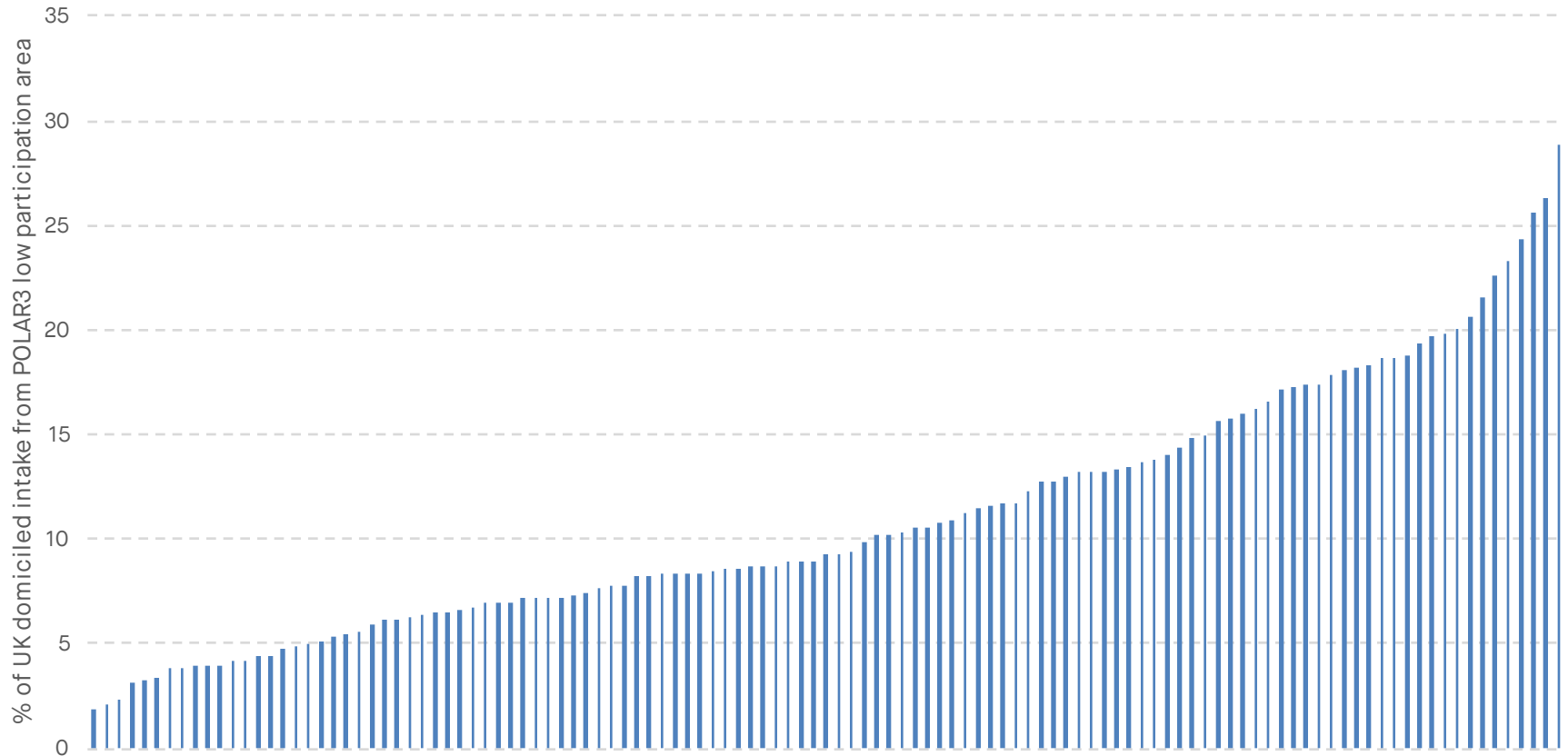
Source: UCAS, End of Cycle Report 2015, Fig 68

## Steady progress on widening participation – but long way to go in order to achieve ambition

- Continuing the present trend in widening participation will not be sufficient to meet the ambition. By 2020, the participation rate would fall 5 percentage points short of what the ambition requires.
- This assumes that the present trend can be sustained on current policies. There are a number of risk factors which may pull down the trend:
  - The improved labour market means more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may choose to work rather than go into higher education – certainly so far, since the lifting of the student numbers cap, demand has been below previous expectations;
  - Government’s ambition on increasing apprenticeship numbers – combined with a higher unit of funding via the apprenticeships levy – may mean that there are more and higher-quality apprenticeship opportunities which draw some young people away from higher education – it’s too early to judge whether this is having an impact; and
  - The switching of student maintenance support from grants for students from the poorest backgrounds to loans may have a negative impact on participation – though the latest UCAS figures indicate little impact so far.
- To think about increasing the trend, we start by examining in more detail the pattern of widening participation across different institutions.

# High variation between institutions in % of intake from disadvantaged backgrounds

Variation in success in widening participation  
% POLAR3 most disadvantaged intake by institution (2014/15 data)



Source: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T1a, young full-time first degree entrants

## Another way of thinking about the variation

- Overall 28.8% more young full-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds entered HE in 2014/15 compared to 2009/10. That's set against an increase of 9.6% overall.
- But this headline improvement hides large differences between institutions.
  - 9 institutions decreased their numbers of disadvantaged students – accounting for a total decrease of 115.
  - A further 12 saw no change (statistics round to the nearest 5 students).
  - 24 achieved an increase, but of 25 students or fewer.
- Overall, the bottom half of institutions in terms of their performance on widening participation made a net contribution of only 9.9% of the increase across the sector in numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- By contrast:
  - 10 institutions managed to increase their intake of students from disadvantaged backgrounds by 150 or more students each – contributing 32% of the total increase in disadvantaged students.
  - The best performing 10% contributed 36% of the increase
  - The best performing 20% contributed 57% of the increase

*Source: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T1a, young full-time first degree entrants*

## The best and the worst performers on widening participation

- The following 9 universities reduced the number of disadvantaged students they took between 2009/10 and 2014/15:
  - London Metropolitan University
  - University of Lancaster
  - University of Bradford
  - University of Keele
  - University for the Creative Arts
  - Conservatoire for Dance and Drama
  - Guildhall School of Music and Drama
  - Middlesex University
  - Royal Agricultural University
  
- By contrast, the following 10 universities increased their intake of disadvantaged students by 150 or more students each – collectively accounting for 32% of the total net increase:
  - University of Central Lancashire
  - Sheffield Hallam University
  - Edge Hill University
  - University of Huddersfield
  - University of Chester
  - University of Northumbria at Newcastle
  - Liverpool John Moores University
  - Birmingham City University
  - Leeds Beckett University
  - Manchester Metropolitan University (largest increase of any institution: 330 more disadvantaged students)

## The best and the worst performers on widening participation

- Looking at who has reduced numbers of disadvantaged students is potentially misleading as a measure of backwards progress in widening participation because some institutions have seen their overall intakes shrink over this period as well.
- Hence we looked at which institutions have reduced the proportion of disadvantaged students within their overall intake.
- On this measure, 13 universities did worse in 2014/15 than 2009/10:
  - Guildhall School of Music and Drama
  - Norwich University of the Arts
  - Royal Agricultural University
  - Conservatoire for Dance and Drama
  - Writtle College
  - London Metropolitan University
  - Harper Adams University
  - University of Winchester
  - Royal College of Music
  - City University
  - Courtauld Institute of Art
  - Ravensbourne
  - University of Lancaster

*Source: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T1a, young full-time first degree entrants*

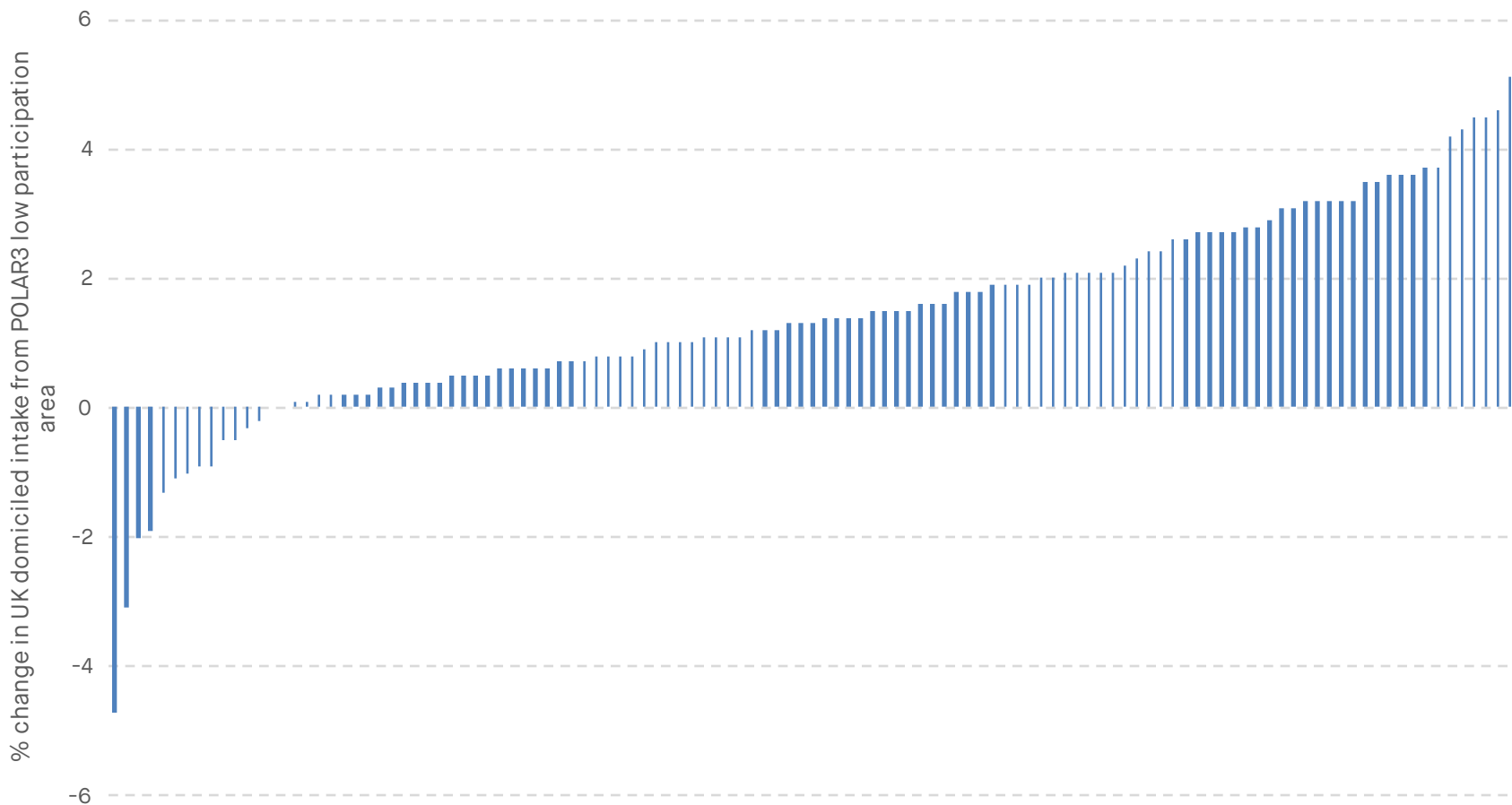


## The best and the worst performers on widening participation

- On the same measure – the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the new intake - a further 15 institutions made very little progress, with an improvement of less than 0.5% over this period:
  - University of Durham
  - Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
  - University of Kent
  - London School of Economics and Political Science
  - University of Bath
  - Falmouth University
  - University of Cambridge
  - Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
  - Royal Academy of Music
  - University of Derby
  - Roehampton University
  - University of Northampton
  - Loughborough University
  - University of Bristol
  - University of York

# The best and the worst performers on widening participation – the variation in improvement

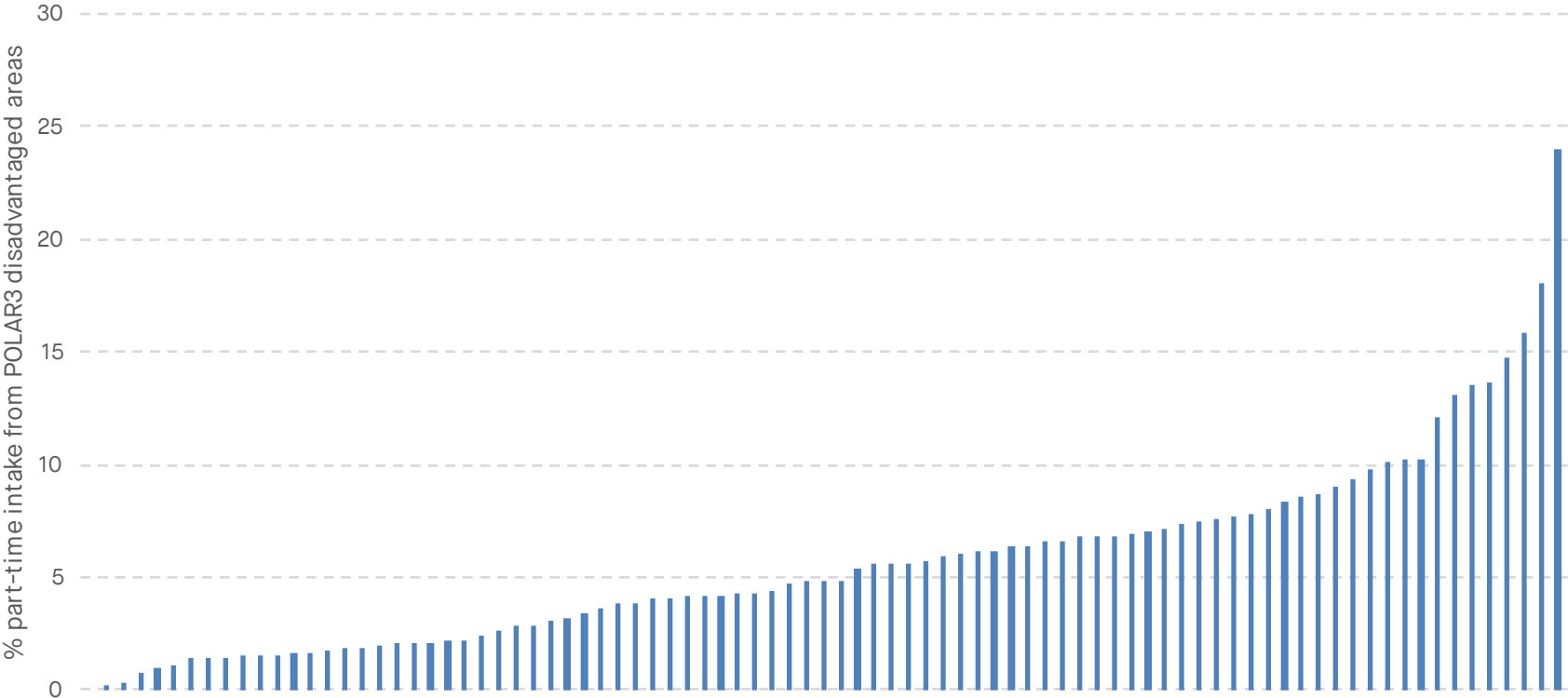
Variation in progress in widening participation 2009/10 to 2014/15  
Change in % POLAR3 disadvantaged intake by institution



Source: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T1a, young full-time first degree entrants

# Variation is just as striking on admitting part-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds

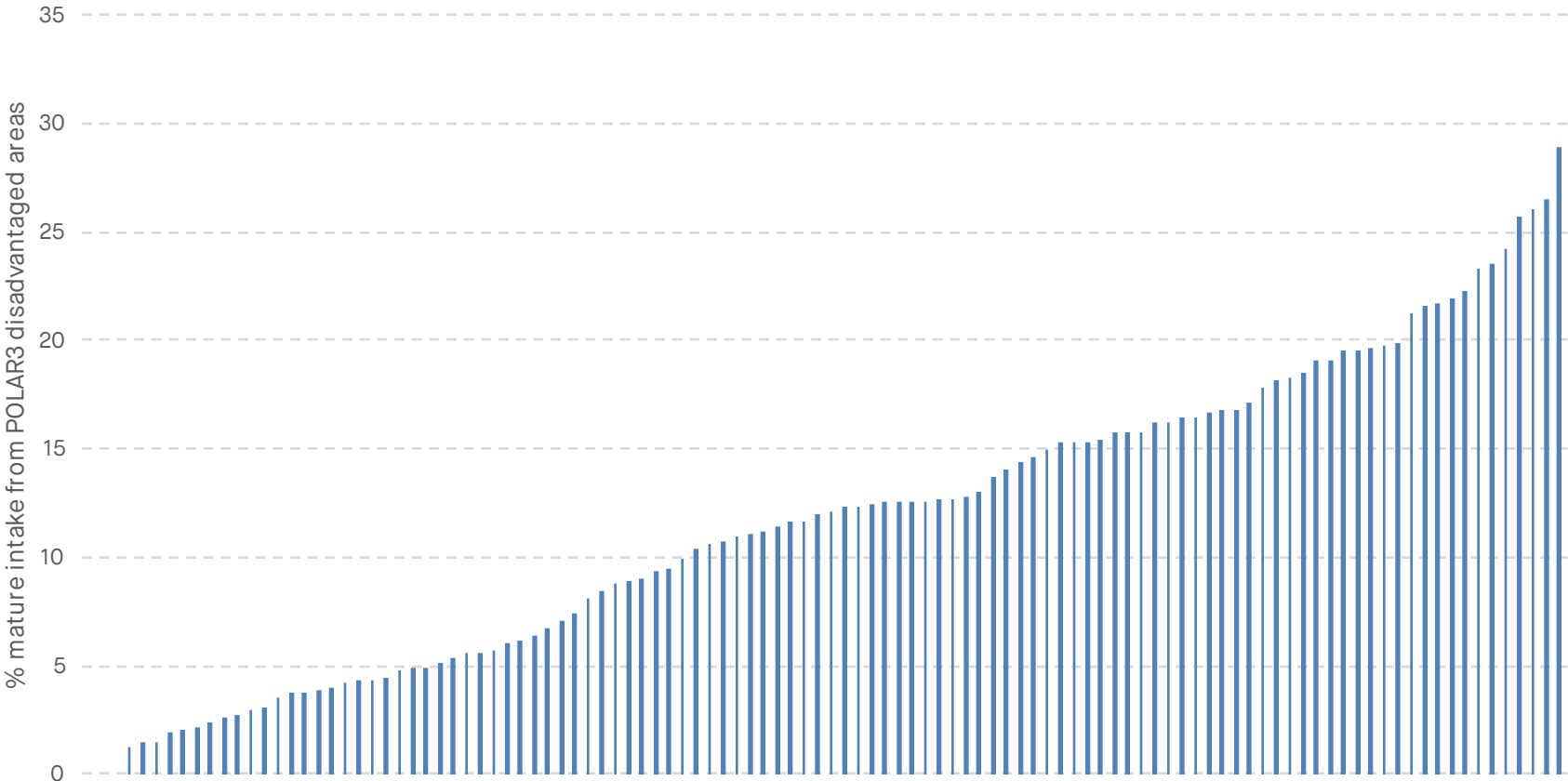
**Variation in success in widening participation**  
 % POLAR3 most disadvantaged part-time intake by institution (2014/15)



Source: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T2b, all part-time undergraduate entrants

# Variation even wider on admitting mature students from disadvantaged backgrounds

**Variation in success in widening participation**  
 % POLAR3 disadvantaged mature intake by institution (2014/15)



Source: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T2a, mature first degree entrants

## Dilemma arising from the variation in widening participation

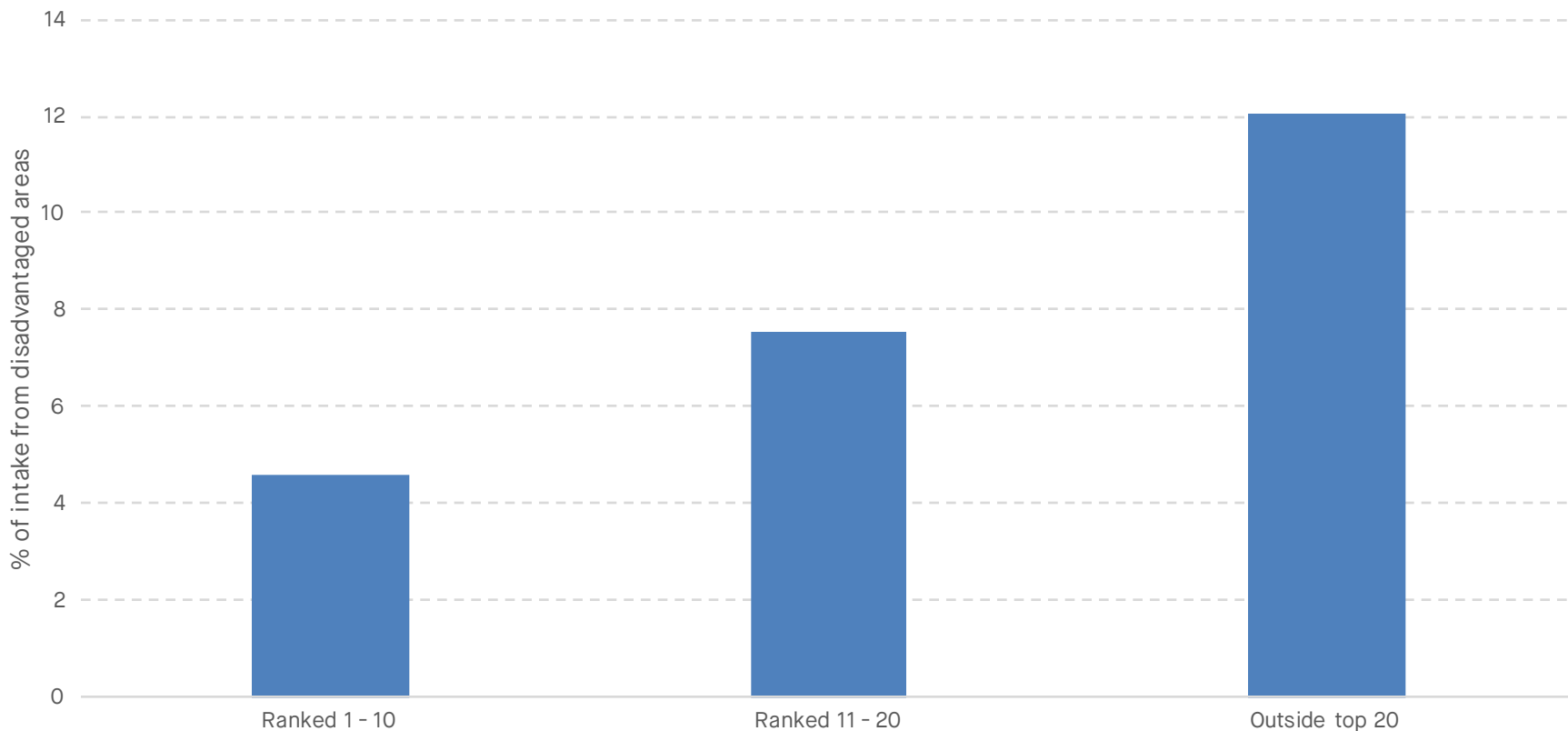
- On the one hand, if the institutions which have shown poor progress so far were to improve, then achieving the ambition on widening participation would be more likely.
  - So far the bottom half of institutions in terms of progress on widening participation have between them contributed only 9.9% of the improvement.
  - However, there are a number of reasons why the potential for these institutions to do significantly more in terms of widening participation may be limited. For example, some of them are small, so even if they did widen participation significantly, this would not go a long way towards meeting the ambition.
  - Many of them are also selective, or high tariff, institutions, so they may be unwilling to widen participation without significant improvements in prior attainment. We will return to this issue.
  
- On the other hand, if there is a set of institutions which have already demonstrated that they can substantially widen participation, then the prospects for meeting the ambition may be stronger if they do more.
  - Just 10 institutions between them contributed 32% of the increase in widening participation so far. Arguably, institutions like these are more likely to be in the right places, have the appropriate recruitment networks and teaching and learning methods that are designed around the needs of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
  - One challenge of 'doubling down' in this way is that, unless institutions of all types are making progress on widening participation, then it may not contribute as much as we would hope to raising social mobility across the country.

## Some evidence there are fewer disadvantaged students in the top ranked institutions

### Which universities are taking more disadvantaged students?

% of UK domiciled intake from POLAR3 disadvantaged areas by THE league table ranking

2014/15 data, young full-time first degree entrants, English universities only

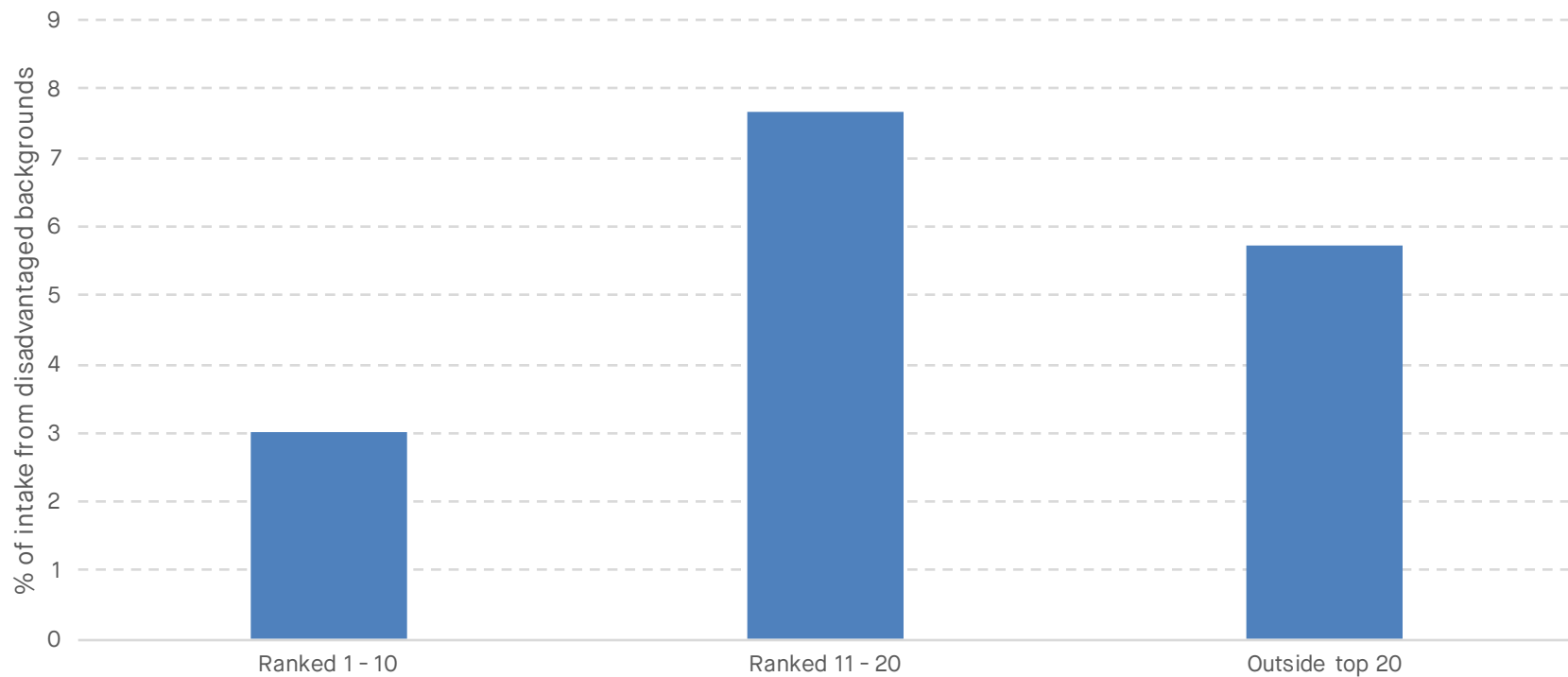


Sources: HESA, *Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T1a, young full-time first degree entrants*; THE World University Rankings 2014/15

## Gap apparent for part time students too though outside the 'top 10' pattern is more consistent

### Part time students: % of intake from POLAR3 most disadvantaged backgrounds by THE ranking (2014/15)

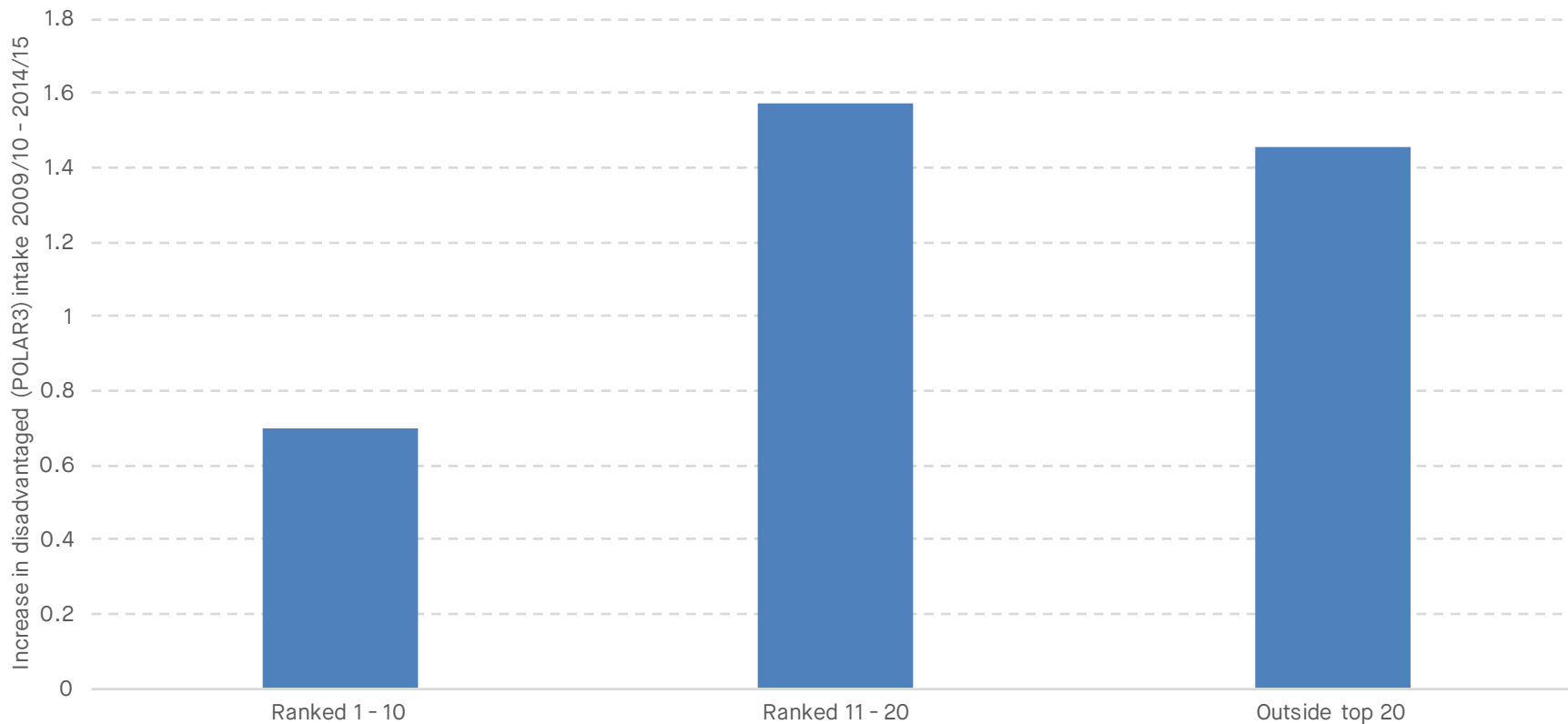
Top 10 perform poorly (e.g. King's 0.3%; Cambridge 0.8%), average dragged up by Bristol  
(13.6%)  
11-20 perform well, led by Liverpool (24%)



Source: HESA, *Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T2b, all part-time undergraduate entrants*

## Equally, in terms of progress on widening participation, this is pretty even outside the 'top 10'

Top 10 universities (THE league table) have made less progress in increasing disadvantaged intake since 2009; similar pattern among the rest



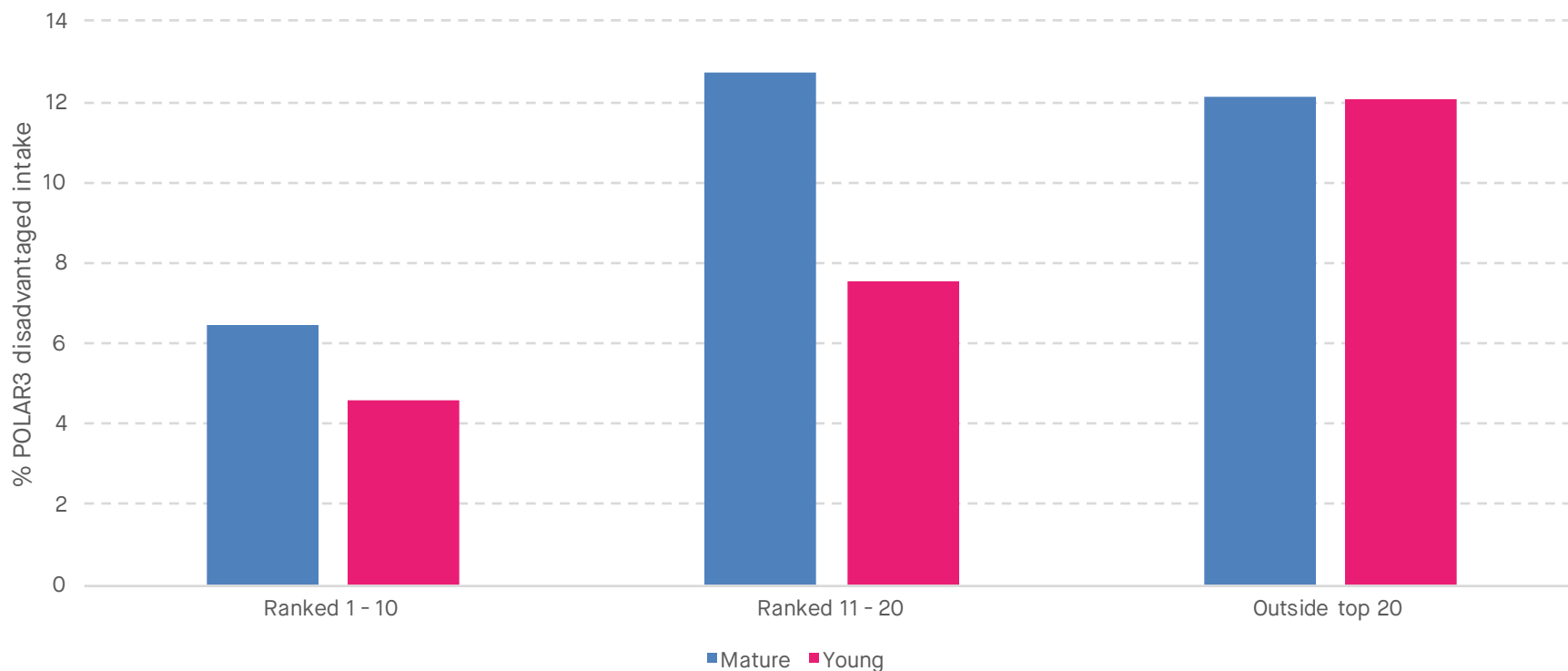
Sources: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Table T1a, young full-time first degree entrants; THE World University Rankings 2014/15



# 'Top universities' doing better with mature students than with young students

## Which universities are taking more disadvantaged students?

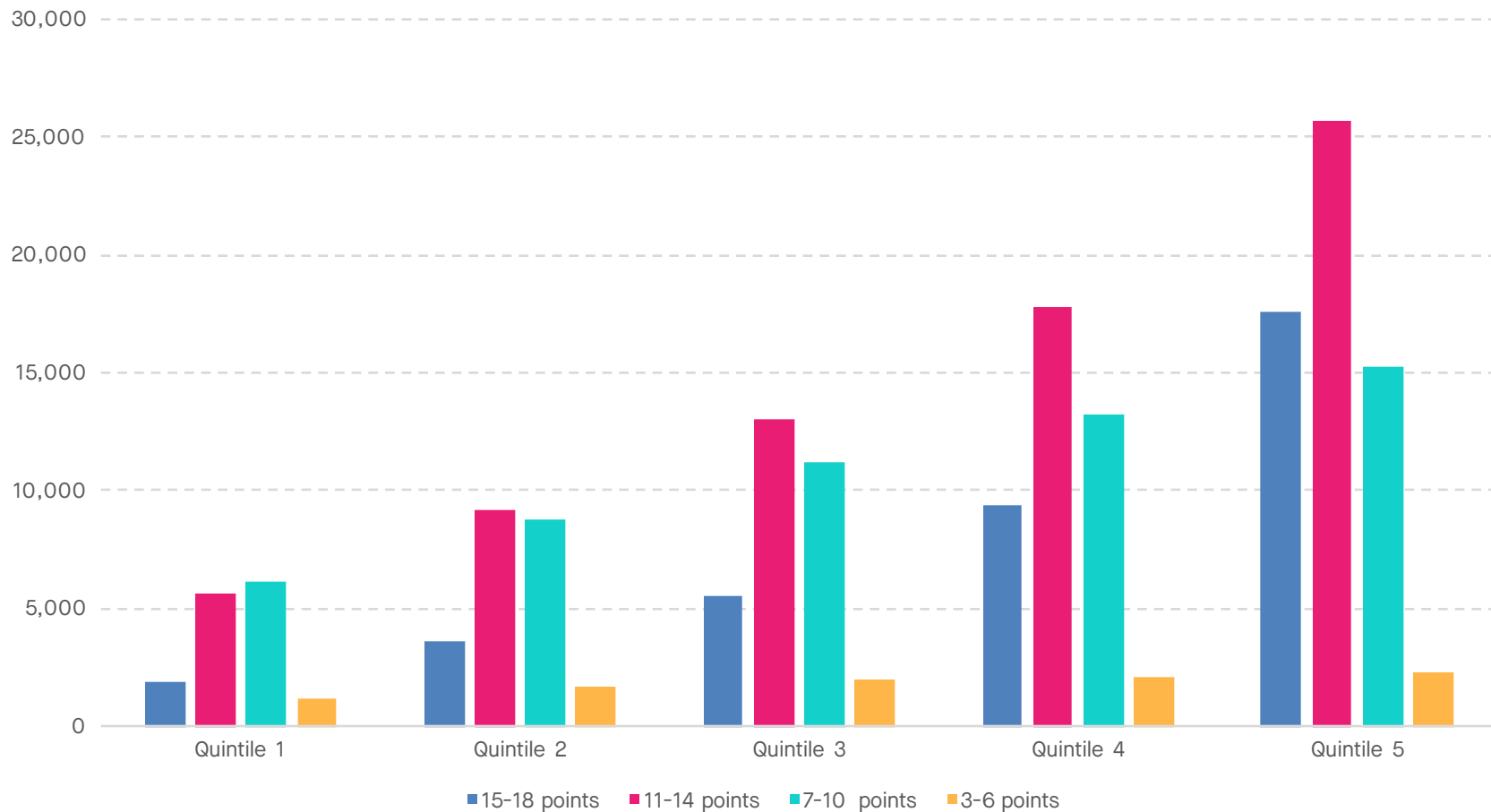
Mature vs young full-time first degree intake, 2014/15 data, by THE league table ranking



Sources: HESA, Widening Participation of Under-represented Groups, Tables T1a and T2a, UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants; THE World University Rankings 2014/15

- The biggest challenge for some institutions that have not contributed much so far in making progress may be prior attainment. Though some even highly selective institutions are making progress.
- Nevertheless UCAS figures – on the next slide - show that the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and those from the most privileged backgrounds is very large. For example, 1,880 young people from the 20% most disadvantaged backgrounds had entry qualifications that placed them in the top bracket compared to 17,560 young people from the most advantaged backgrounds.
- In the next bracket of entry qualifications, there were 5,645 young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds compared to 25,650 from the most advantaged.
- One response to this attainment gap may be asking what HE institutions can do to improve attainment. Current outreach activities on the whole are not designed expressly to do this. Question is whether institutions should be spending money instead on tuition, summer schools and other measures designed specifically to raise attainment.
- Latest Government guidance to the Office for Fair Access also suggests that more institutions could directly take on responsibility for running schools.

**Number of applicants by POLAR3 quintile and number of UCAS points (2015)**



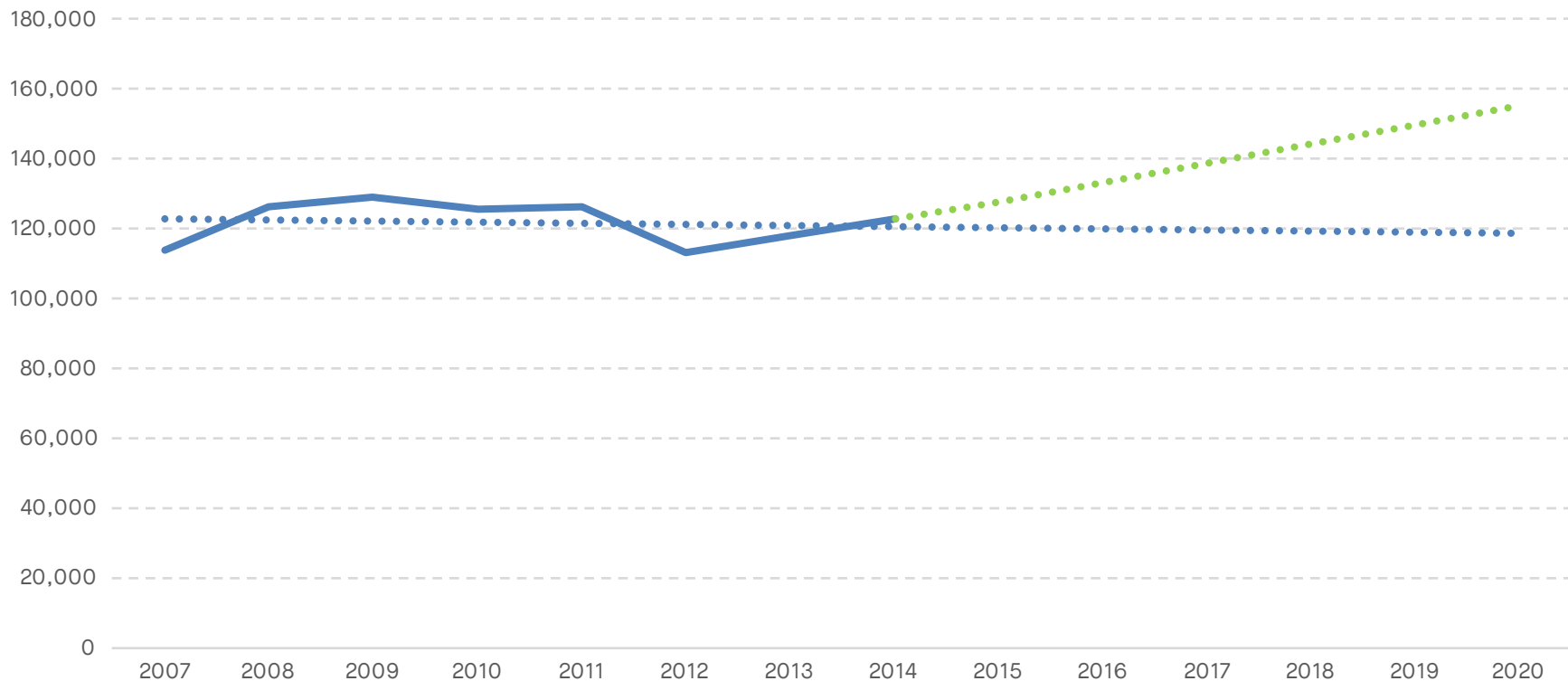
*Source: UCAS, Applicants and acceptances by groups of applicants, 2015*

- Looking carefully at the list of institutions that have not so far made a significant contribution to widening participation, some of them are not selective or high tariff institutions.
- Indeed some of them are institutions that are choosing stability in student numbers over expansion (it is easier to target widening participation when an institution is expanding); and then some of them are institutions which are struggling to recruit in general.
- This underlines wider challenges in meeting the Government's ambition. Questions which may need to be considered further include:
  - Is greater competition in the future likely to worsen the position of some institutions that have contributed a lot to widening participation? On the other hand, it's possible that we may see new providers set up with an explicit mission to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In any case, it's likely that this is where the marginal demand will be, i.e. the best qualified, most advantaged groups are less likely to choose new providers over top ranked established ones.
  - What levers does Government have to drive progress? The 'passport-ing power' of the Office for Fair Access on allowing institutions to charge fees above £6,000 per year is the obvious one though this has not been used robustly to date.
  - Whether the ambition on widening participation could be broadened over time to include older and part-time students? Focusing on progress in social mobility for a single cohort at a time runs against the wider policy direction towards lifelong learning, e.g. the significant improvements on the horizon for part-time student finance.

# The second ambition – this raises its own challenges too

## Number of UK domiciled first year undergraduate BME students: Government unlikely to meet BME target of 20% increase in numbers by 2020

Solid blue line: actual university entry data  
 Dotted blue line: projected based on average trend  
 Dotted green line: number

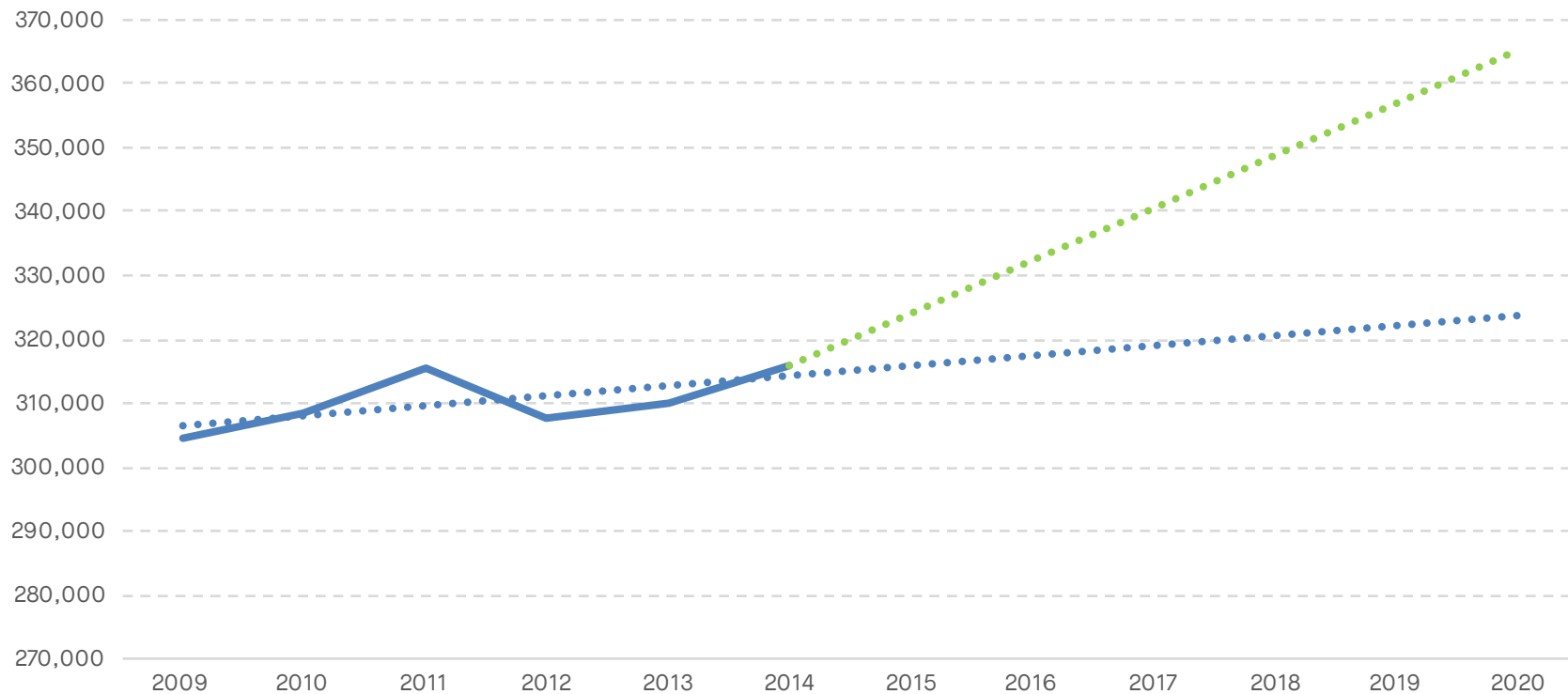


Source: HESA, 'Students, Qualifiers and Staff data tables', Students by Ethnicity (Table 13), total first year ethnic minority undergraduates

# The second ambition – still very challenging even if taking all undergraduates

## Number of UK domiciled BME undergraduate students: Gvt unlikely to meet target of 20% increase in numbers by 2020

Solid blue line: actual university entry data  
 Dotted blue line: projected based on average trend  
 Dotted green line: numbers needed



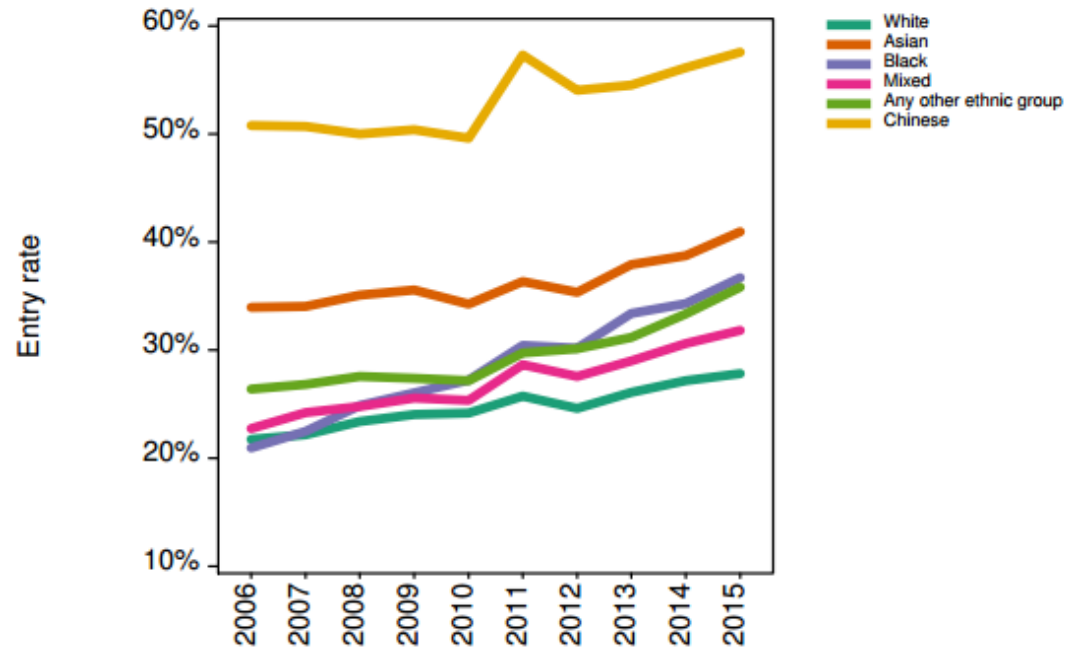
Source: HESA, 'Students, Qualifiers and Staff data tables', Students by Ethnicity (Table 13), total ethnic minority undergraduates

## The second ambition – requires a very different focus to the first one

- As the Government Green Paper observes, the first ambition on widening participation will require a special focus on young people from white backgrounds. UCAS data on comparative participation rates – presented on the next slide - bears that out very starkly.
- The second ambition broadens the focus to young people from BME backgrounds too.
- Increasing participation among young people from BME backgrounds – undoubtedly necessary to achieve the second ambition – while closing the gap for white young people – probably necessary to achieve the first ambition – looks very challenging.
- It's possible that the focus for the second ambition should be specific institutions which have low numbers of young people from BME backgrounds.

# The second ambition – requires a very different focus to the first one

**Figure 88 Entry rates for English 18 year old state school pupils by ethnic group**



Source: UCAS, End of Cycle Report 2015, Figure 88



- On current trends, Government will not achieve its ambitions for widening participation by 2020.
- Looking at progress so far, and in particular the wide variation between institutions, there is a dilemma to be resolved: whether to focus on improving the performance of institutions which have made little progress; or to rely even more on those who have contributed the largest share of widening participation.
- Improving the performance of those who have made little progress may require institutions themselves to get much more involved in raising prior attainment. Outreach alone may be insufficient.
- The wider market environment in the sector will also have a major impact on progress. Many institutions are exposed to new competitive pressures. On the other hand, some new providers may provide a boost to widening participation.
- Focusing on young, full-time students alone in terms of improving social mobility creates the risk that there may comparatively be much less progress on widening participation among part-time or mature students.
- The second ambition on widening participation – focusing on young people from BME backgrounds – may run at odds with the first one, especially given the lowest prior attainment and HE participation rates currently are among young people from white backgrounds.