

# The characteristics of students in London higher education and how they link to experience and outcomes

## Analysis by London Higher

### Introduction

London higher education institutions (HEIs) are home to over 485,000 students, across over 50 different providers. The region has the highest rates of progression to HE in England and its HEIs are a driving force for social mobility, with the result that London HEIs have a hugely diverse student population.

For Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submissions 2023, all HEIs must make a 'provider submission', including information on the 'provider context' such as student characteristic information. This briefing note supports providers across London HE by highlighting relevant evidence regarding the characteristics of London students more broadly. This may not reflect every HEI's demographic but offers both broader contextual information on the region, and signposts sources of further data. The note breaks these down into contextual factors, student experience indicators and student outcome indicators to reflect the TEF submission.

### Contextual factors

#### Londoners in London higher education (HE)

A very high number of students entering London HE are themselves Londoners. Though the proportion of Londoners varies from institution to institution (and between courses within institutions), at a general level, Londoners are more likely to choose London as their region of study than any other region of the UK. In 2018/19, 46.6% of 'young Londoners' – those aged 18-24 – progressing to HE attended a higher education institution in London. The figure increases to 60.5% if looking at the 21-24-year-old age cohort within this group. Thus, discussion of student characteristics in London must include a discussion of the characteristics of Londoners.

## Prior attainment

Londoners outperform their peers elsewhere in England in statutory examinations at Key stage 4 and Key stage 5 and the disadvantage gap is lower in London than elsewhere in England. This is a trend that has accelerated in recent years, as London Higher’s briefing note on 2022’s A-Level results illustrates.

Significant gaps in attainment do exist, however. Black Caribbean and Free School Meals-eligible White boys in London perform least well at GCSE level. At level 3, qualification profiles vary considerably between students from different ethnic backgrounds, with Black African and Black Caribbean Londoners aged 18-24 most likely to hold at least one E grade.

The GLA’s London Education Report is a useful point of reference as are the regular briefings produced by London Council’s Young People’s Education and Skills team.

## Learning loss

The richest longitudinal data currently available on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on those who are approaching university age is the UCL-Sutton Trust Covid Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) Study. Wave 1 findings show considerable gaps both in the lockdown learning experience and in access to education catch-up support (e.g. the National Tutoring Programme) between the most and least deprived groups and schools. London Higher’s AccessHE division’s research in summer 2020, based on polling of c.1000 students, found that, on average, London students aged 16-18 spent fewer hours per day studying and had fewer online contact hours with their school/college than students elsewhere in England.

## Student experience indicators

Students at London-based providers tend to rate their student experience more negatively than their peers elsewhere in England in the National Student Survey (NSS). The reasons for this are complex and manifold – and there is little consensus on which factor (if any) plays the decisive role in these views. London Higher will shortly be publishing a London annex to HEPI-AdvanceHE’s Student Academic Experience Survey to shed light on the views of London students.

## Student outcomes indicators

### Continuation

Non-continuation rates in London HEIs are higher than elsewhere in England. [GLA-commissioned research](#) disaggregating these figures has found that the rates are highest for Black students in London HE at 13%.

The same research has indicated that term-time accommodation may explain a large proportion of the non-continuation gap between Black and White students in London. London Higher looked at the impact of commuting on continuation in London HE and found longer commuting times to negatively affect progression from year one of study. A far higher proportion of students in London are commuter students than in any other English region; the proportion of commuter students is highest of all amongst Londoners studying in London, [63% of whom live at home during their studies](#) (2015/16).

### Completion/degree awarding

London Higher's AccessHE division's 2021 research report [Going Beyond BAME](#) looked in detail at awarding gaps by ethnicity in London. It found that, whilst the headline gap in 2018/19 in 'good honours' degrees (2:1 or above) between Black and White students in London is lower than the UK average (15% vs 22% nationally), the gap in first class honours degrees specifically is higher, and varies significantly between different ethnic groups, as well as between providers. The report points to some factors (including those identified by students themselves) that may be contributing to the gaps as well as outlining provider-led efforts to close them.

It is important to recognize that these efforts are taking place in the context of a regional HE ecosystem in which diversity is the norm: 63% of young students entering London HE in 2016 were from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds and [this figure may rise to 73% by 2030 based on recent projections](#).

### Progression

Drilling down into graduate progression outcomes in London, it appears to be 'London stayers'- that is, Londoners who study in London and remain there to work – who are least likely to benefit from the employment opportunities on offer in the capital. [London stayers are the most likely of all London students to progress into non-graduate jobs](#), and [London stayers are least likely of all groups of stayers/movers nationally to say they are in 'fair' work](#).

This may be attributable to the influx of graduates from other parts of the country to take up elite jobs, which acts as a ceiling on social mobility for London graduates from less affluent backgrounds.

If you have any questions or would like more information on any of the above, please contact Dr. Richard Boffey, Head of AccessHE on [richard.boffey@londonhigher.ac.uk](mailto:richard.boffey@londonhigher.ac.uk).