# A new panacea? Contextual Data is suddenly supported and endorsed

- In Secretary of State guidance to OFFA in Feb 2011
- In OFFA guidance to HEIs in March 2011 & 2012
- In government strategy on Social Mobility ('*Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers*') in April 2011 & May 2012
- By UCAS and SPA

How to produce an access agreement for 2012-13

Usage is set to rise

Figure 4: Prevalence of use of contextual data across courses/departments/faculties in past, present and future
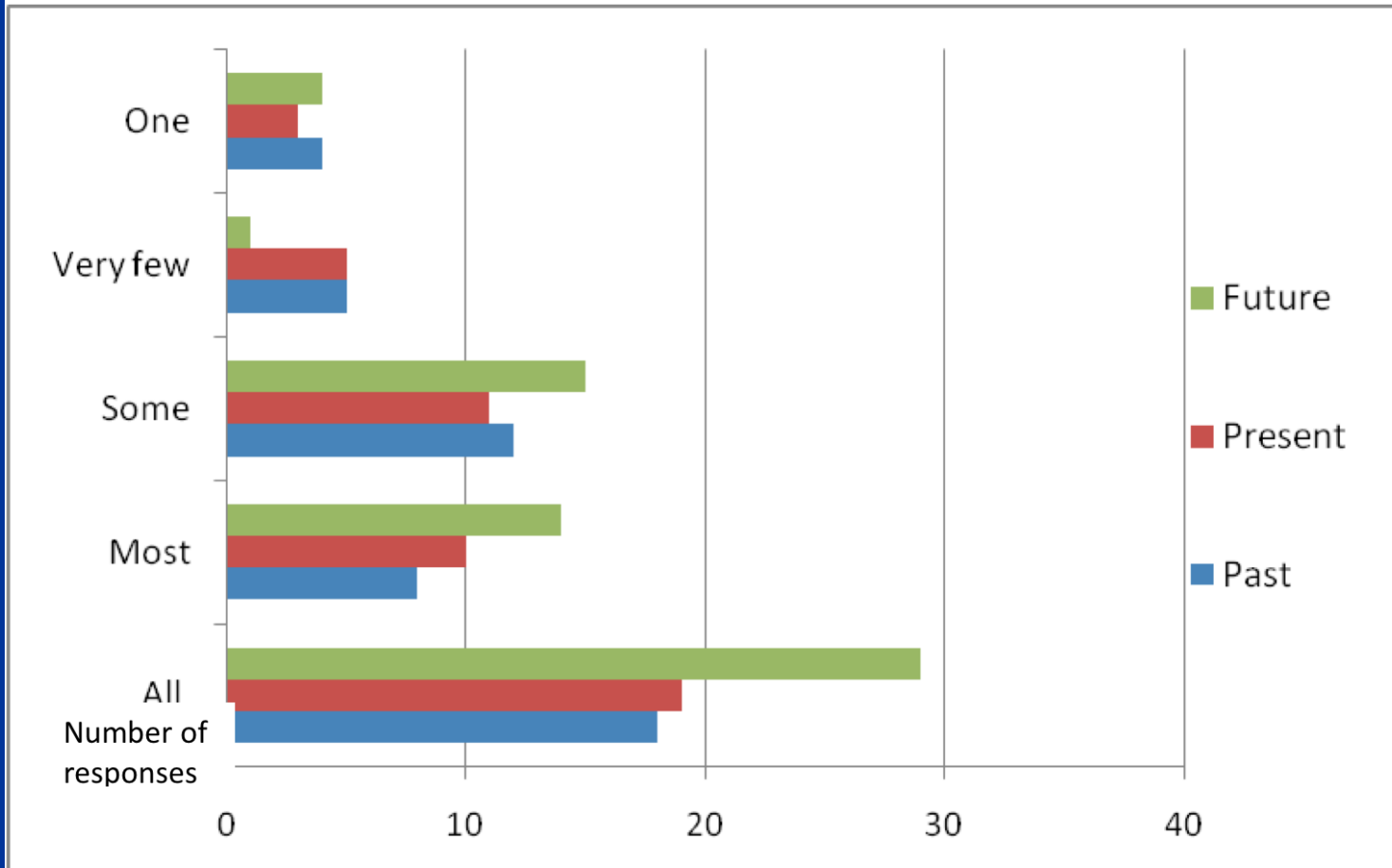
(Source: SPA, September 2011)

Fair admissions, contextual data & apple pie

- Everyone agrees admissions should be 'fair'

- Problems only arise when we try to:
  a) define it
  b) follow this through with actions and policies

- **How** do Universities define fairness and use contextual data?

- **What** is going on with 'fair admissions'? Can we **'map'** the different positions HEIs take with regard to fair admissions and contextual data?

- **Why** do HEIs take these positions?

The University
of Manchester

RELATIVE
ACADEMIC
CRITERIA
Allow adjusted academic
criteria via
'differential' offers

INDIVIDUAL
MODEL
Not using socially
contextual data

SOCIAL
MODEL
Using socially
contextual data

Only standard academic
criteria allowed
ABSOLUTE
ACADEMIC
CRITERIA

Fair Access & contextual data: why bother?

- Why would any HEI take an approach that prioritised using contextual data?

- The US philosopher Sandel (2009) argues there are 3 reasons why HEIs in the United States engage in such action:

  1. Because of a 'test bias' (a version of achievement v potential)
  2. To redress/recognise a past wrong (e.g. Race in South Africa, Aboriginals in Australia, Race in US, Social/Educational Disadvantage in UK?)
 3. To promote diversity

The 'test bias': achievement ≠ potential

Emerging evidence base in the UK

- e.g. HEFCE (2003; 2005); Sullivan, Zimdars & Heath (2009); data from GCSEs at Oxford's Medical School, Hoare & Johnson (2010)

- Lots of HEIs using their own internal datasets & methodologies to identify the same trends at institutional level

- Key point for any University that takes seriously the research evidence is this: whilst it's the most important *single* factor **past achievement is not a perfect predictor of future potential**
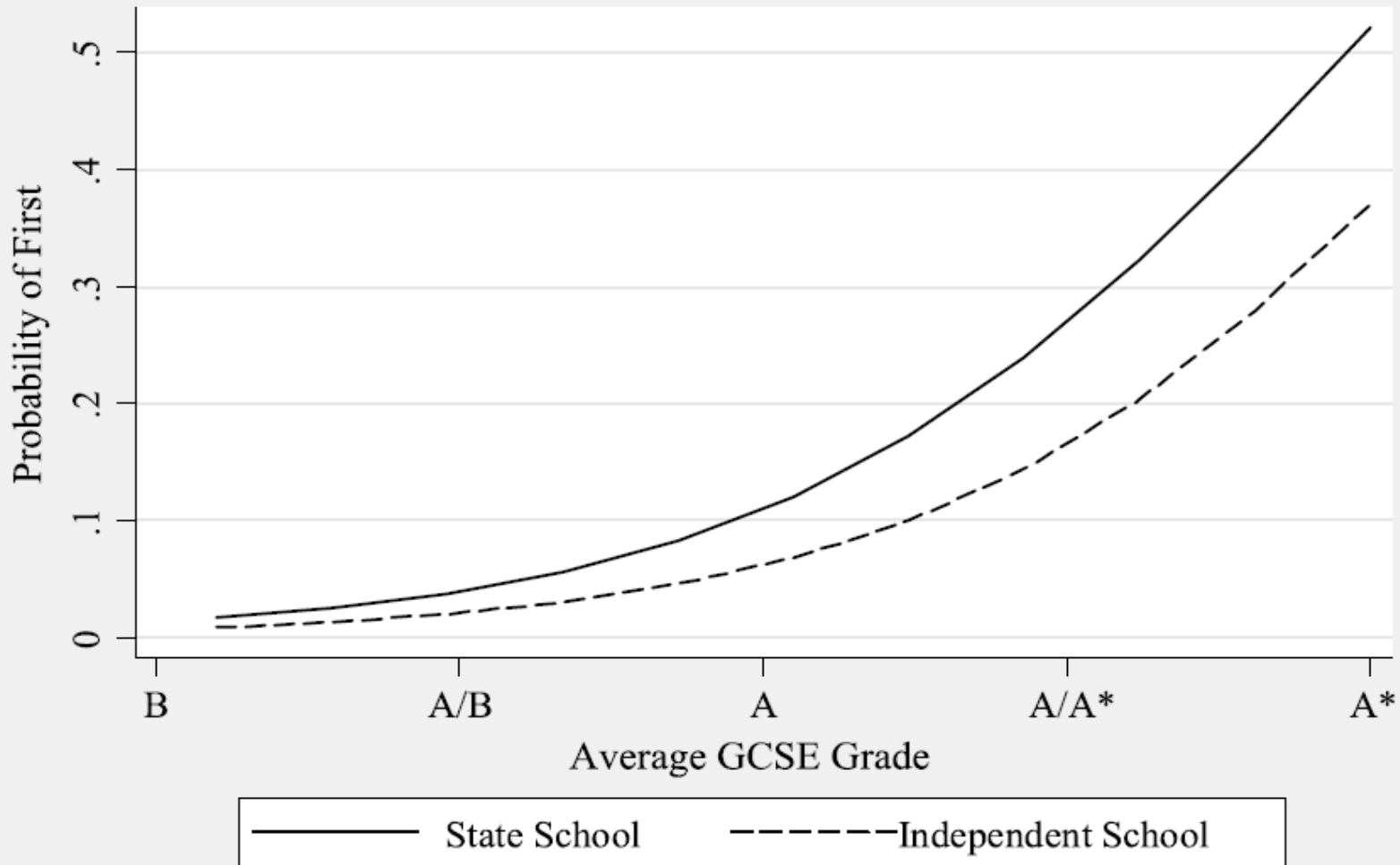
HEFCE (2005) evidence looking at A levels

Figure 3: A-level points, school type and HE achievement
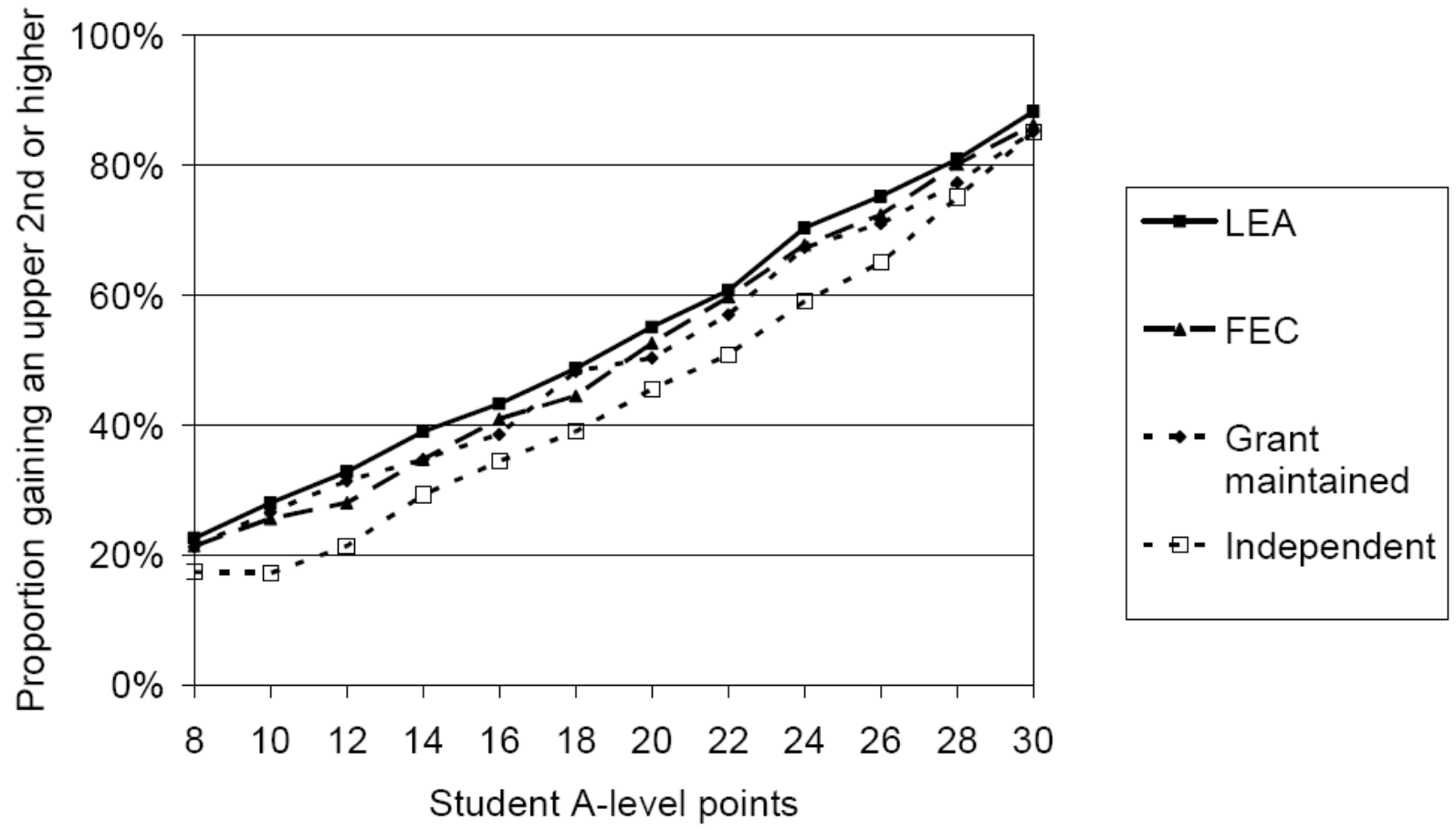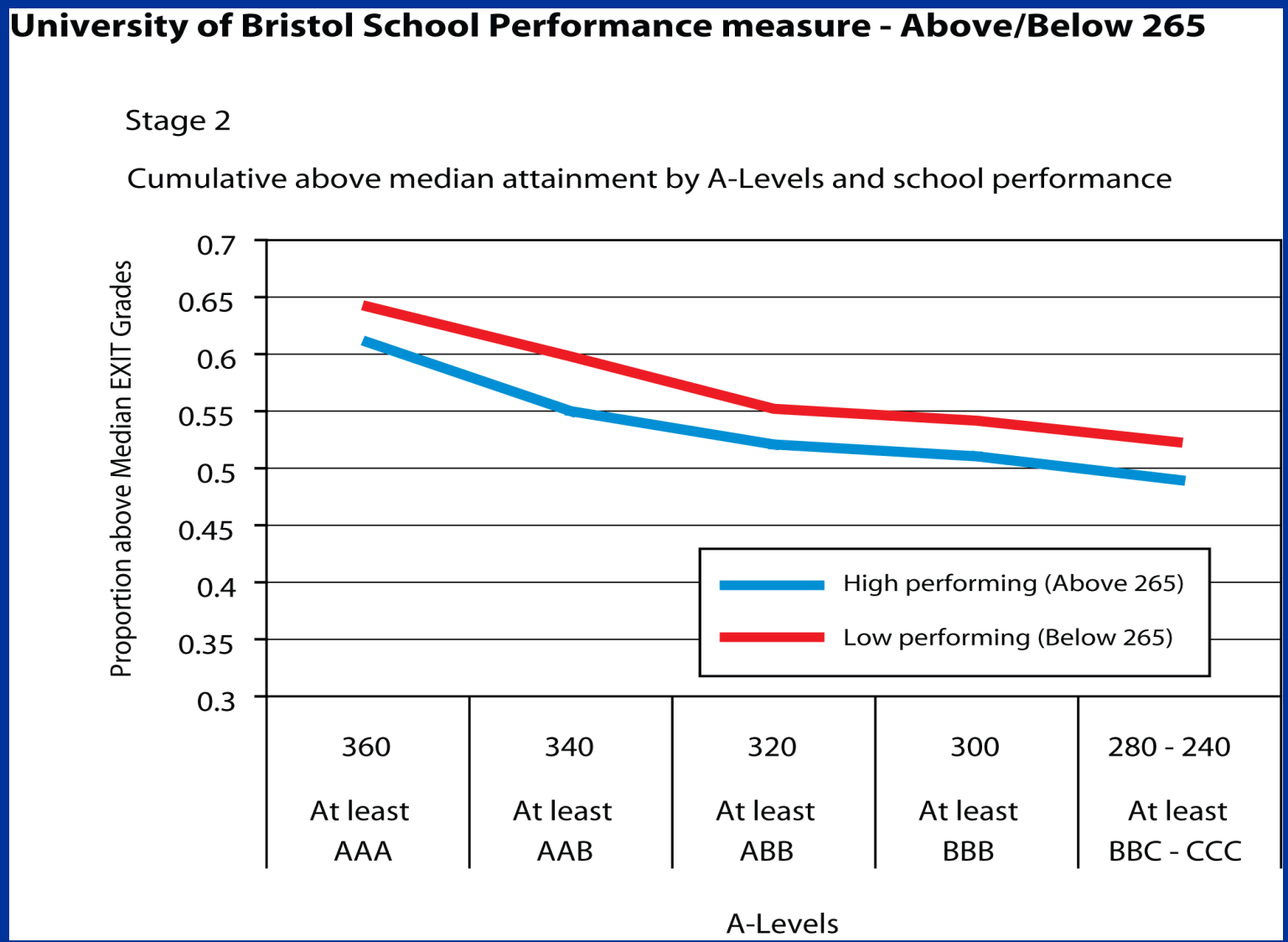
Sullivan, Zimdars & Heath (2009) : GCSEs & first class degrees at Oxford

Research by Tony Hoare at Bristol University

University of Bristol School Performance measure - Above/Below 265

Stage 2

Cumulative above median attainment by A-Levels and school performance

Audience question

Why do some very advantaged students seemingly 'underperform' at HE compared to similarly qualified A level candidates from less advantaged backgrounds?

Explanations by School-Type

British Educational Research Journal
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713406264

Schooling effects on degree performance: a comparison of the predictive validity of aptitude testing and secondary school grades at Oxford University
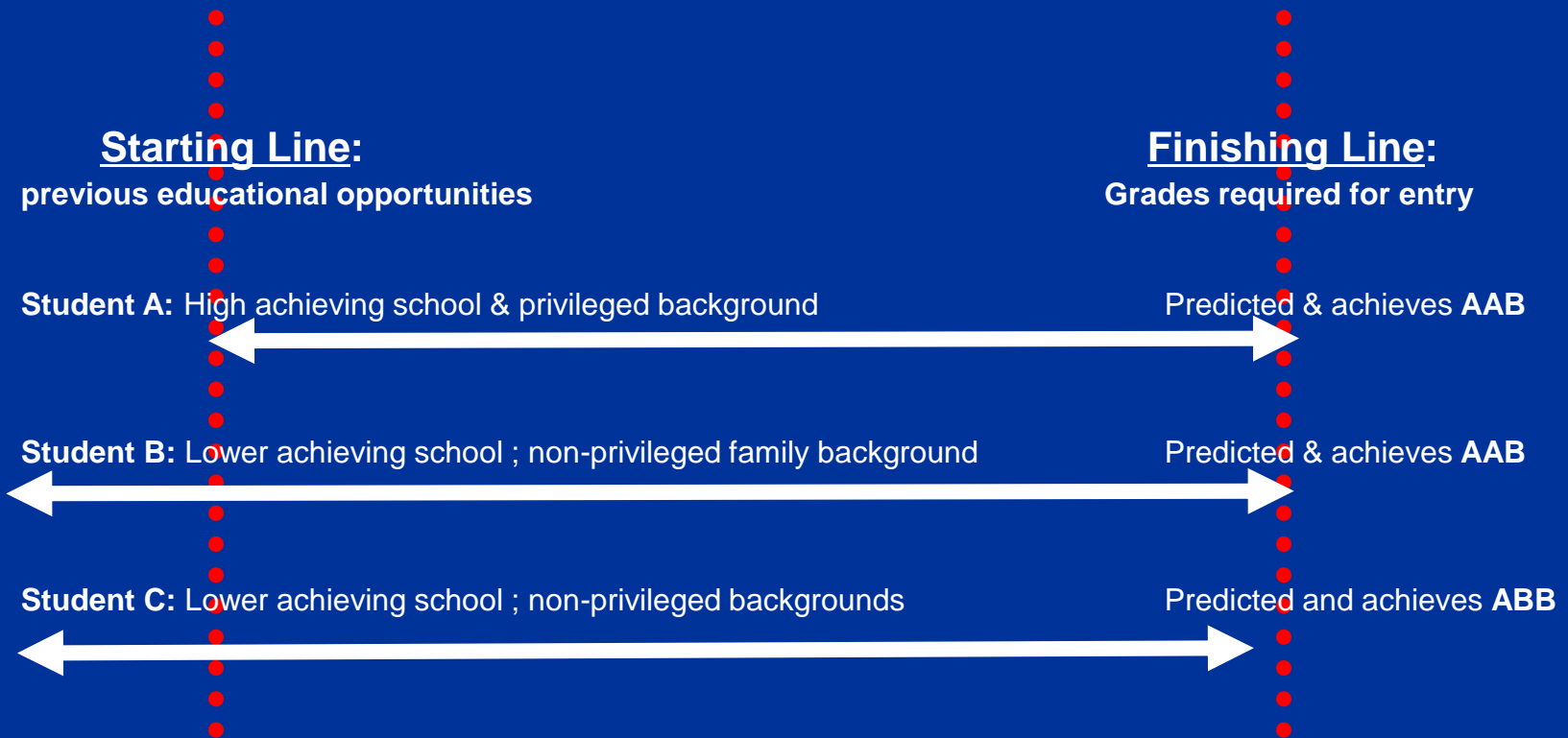
Tom Ogg[a]; Anna Zimdars[b]; Anthony Heath[c]
[a] Formerly of Oxford University, UK [b] University of Manchester, UK [c] Oxford University, UK

Volume 32 Number 1 February 2006

British Educational Research Journal
Journal of the British Educational Research Association

"Private school students perform less well in final examinations relative to their GCSE results when compared with state school students, but they do not under perform relative to their aptitude test scores or in gross terms. It is therefore argued that teaching effects, associated with private school students, distort secondary school grades as an indicator of academic potential in higher education when compared to state school students."

2. Redress

- Less common in UK
- Should current generations pay for past wrongs?
- A deficit model? A version of victimhood?
- Perhaps 'overcoming barriers' is a better and adapted version of this in a UK context?

Fair Access & overcoming barriers

Starting Line:
previous educational opportunities

Finishing Line:
Grades required for entry

Student A: High achieving school & privileged background — Predicted & achieves **AAB**

Student B: Lower achieving school ; non-privileged family background — Predicted & achieves **AAB**

Student C: Lower achieving school ; non-privileged backgrounds — Predicted and achieves **ABB**
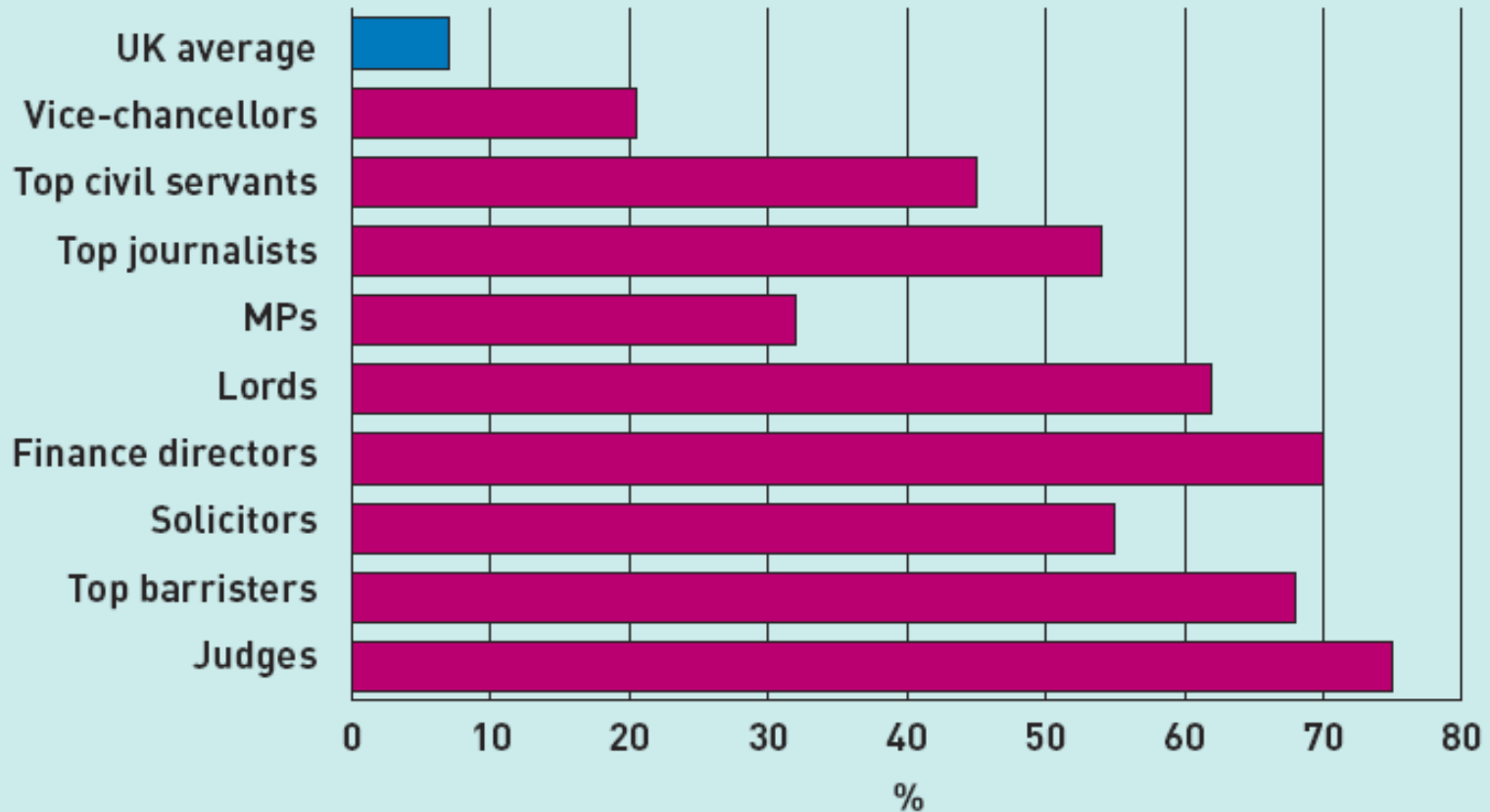
3. Diversity

- Benefits for HEIs

- Benefits for professions

- Benefits for democracy

Entrants to the third most elective HEIs

Fair Access – the link of School-HE-Professions

Figure 1f: Proportion of professionals independently schooled by profession[11]

The University of Manchester's approach to Contextual Data:

Julian Skyrme The University of Manchester

Key points

- Undergraduate UK home applicants supplemented with 4 pieces of contextual data

- Affects ALL UoM UG Schools/programmes

- Contextual data 'FLAGS' are generated automatically

- All flagged applicants must receive 'additional consideration' but this does not lead to either:

  - an automatic offer

  - or a lower offer

- There is no change to standard academic thresholds apart from in our local Manchester Access Programme, where students undertake *additional* work to receive a differential offer

How we use contextual data

Stage 1: Academic criteria		Stage 2: Non-academic criteria		Stage 3: Aptitude and additional measures	Stage 4: Interview	Stage 5: Confirmation & Clearing
Level 2 GCSE or equivalent	Level 3 'A' Level or equivalent	Personal statement	Reference	e.g. UKCAT, course specific test, skills test & portfolio.		
Contextual Data **NOT** taken into account. Applicants must meet standard academic criteria		Contextual Data **IS** taken into account Where and How will depend on the particular process in the School				

What contextual indicators are used?

Contextual Data Indicators to generate flags	Rationale
Indicator 1: Education Level 2 School Performance at Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent). *Where this is below average for the School attended they are flagged.*	Evidence shows that students from low performing schools achieve *at least as well* as other Manchester students when entering with the same academic performance. They have also shown evidence of *exceptional* and *outstanding* performance in relation their particular educational context.
Indicator 2: Educational Level 3 School/College Performance at Level 3 (A- level or equivalent). *Where this is below average for School/College attended they are flagged.*	Evidence shows that students from low performing schools achieve *at least as well* as other Manchester students when entering with the same academic performance. They have also shown evidence of *exceptional* and *outstanding* performance in relation their particular educational context.
Indicator 3: Social demographic *Where they live in disadvantaged postcode with low progression to HE this is flagged*	Evidence shows that students from low participation areas achieve *at least as well* as other Manchester students when entering with the same academic performance. They have also shown evidence of *exceptional* and outstanding performance in relation to their particular social and family context.
Indicator 4: Care Experience *Where been in care for 3 months they are flagged*	Students from care-experienced backgrounds have the lowest participation in HE and have shown exceptional performance to have met Manchester's entrance thresholds.

MANCHESTER 1824

What happens when they receive a flag?

- Flagged applicants receive 'additional consideration'

- nature of 'additional consideration' depends on School admissions process

- flagged applicants do <u>not</u>

       - receive an automatic offer

       - receive a lower offer

- therefore is no alteration to academic criteria

- is a reflective rather than mechanical process

- no decisions are ever based on contextual data alone – it simply enhances existing processes

Departmental Admissions Processes

Stage 1: Academic criteria		Stage 2: Non-academic criteria		Stage 3: Aptitude and additional measures	Stage 4: Interview	Stage 5: Confirmation & Clearing
Level 2 GCSE or equivalent	Level 3 'A' Level or equivalent	Personal statement	Reference	e.g. UKCAT, course specific test, skills test & portfolio.		
Contextual Data **NOT** taken into account. Applicants must meet standard academic criteria	Contextual Data **IS** taken into account Where and How will depend on the particular process in the School					
	Where personal statement and reference is used to select, decision-makers must understand applicant is from underrepresented background and outstanding in relation to their social/educational context		When using additional aptitude measures selectors will look at achievement in context	Where interview is used to select, decision-makers must understand applicant is from underrepresented background and outstanding in relation to their social/educational context	Where applicants narrowly miss grades at confirmation selectors might look at their overall pool and consider those who have still achieved high in relation to their social/educational context	

What proportion of applicants are flagged?

• There is no quota. Depends on proportion of applicants in any one year who below the thresholds and experience social and educational disadvantage

• Based on historical data estimations are:

Faculty	Flagged	Total	Percentage
EPS	1189	5409	22.0%
Humanities	3231	16484	19.6%
Life Sciences	565	2348	24.1%
MHS	1725	6056	28.5%
University Total	**6710**	**30297**	**22.1%**

How does it work in practice?

• The application of the contextual data flag is an automatic process

• A specific screen in our admissions IT system has been created with flags and key information from the application

Further information

Web

http://www.manchester.ac.uk/undergraduate/howtoapply/generalentryrequirements/

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Issues

- Is it the role of HEIs to examine social background as a factor in the admissions process?
- Should some people be concerned? E.g. Independent or Grammar schools?
- We don't all agree on what fairness means
- Need for HEIs and school sector to improve understanding of *what* positions are being taken
- Important we de-politicise fair access and contextual data – HEIs, SPA and UCAS should ensure independence of institutional judgements
- Evidence base will continue to develop