

**CONSULTATION ON STATISTICS
THAT MEASURE THE PROGRESS
OF CHILDREN FROM
DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS
TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

Full-time Young Participation by
Socio-Economic Class
(FYPSEC)

An Official Statistics
Consultation

JUNE 2011

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Consultation on statistics that measure the progress of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to Higher Education

The government has an ongoing interest in monitoring the educational achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with a view to narrowing the gap in achievement between disadvantaged youngsters and their peers. Currently, the key headline measures based on individual student profiles that are designed to monitor young people’s achievement in reaching Higher Education (HE) are shown in the table.

Name of metric	Definition
Full-time young participation by socio-economic class (FYPSEC)	‘The gap’ between the initial participation in full-time higher education rates for young people aged 18,19 and 20 from the top three and bottom four socio-economic classes.
The Free School Meals measure (FSM measure)	The proportion of young people aged 15 in maintained schools by FSM status who progress to HE by age 19.

The “FYPSEC statistic” has been published annually in an Official Statistics release produced by the Higher Education Analysis division of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The consultation relates to changes to this publication.

The national “FSM statistic” was published in the same document in 2010 and also on the secure Communities and Local Government data exchange Hub where it was used by Local Authorities to measure progress in raising HE aspirations for their young people.

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Respond by: 1 August 2011

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Views are welcome from all users on these changes, including, but not limited to, user groups and stakeholder bodies, media organisations, academics, business owners, members of the general public, as well as government officials. The responses we receive in connection with this consultation will all receive consideration. We would also welcome any comments of a more general kind about the scope and layout of the publication.

This consultation does not include any proposals to change government policy or regulation and will have no direct impact on, and no direct cost or burden to, businesses or individuals. As such no Impact Assessment has been included with this consultation document.

1. Executive Summary

We continue to aim to maximise the usefulness and accessibility of the Official Statistics published on widening participation. For this reason, BIS Analysts propose to implement some key changes to this publication. The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on the key changes that we propose to make. The proposals are threefold:

Proposal 1 - methodological change (replace FYPSEC with the “FSM measure”)

The change reflects longstanding weaknesses with the Socio-economic Class variable but equally the added benefits of using the FSM measure in terms of versatility and its policy relevance to the Social Mobility agenda. Annex A and Annex B present the arguments for this change.

Proposal 2 - changes to the format and contents of the publication based on using the FSM measure as the core analysis

The use of the FSM measure will also support changes to the scope and contents of the release. For example, the inclusion of new tables that show FSM Progression Rates disaggregated by local authority area and an annotated map

Proposal 3 – a new statistic that shows access to the most selective third of institutions by school type

As part of the Government’s Social Mobility Strategy¹ new metrics have been developed based on progression rates to Higher Education. The aforementioned FSM measure is one such Social Mobility metrics relating to Higher Education. However, a new metric is also being developed that shows progression rates into the highest tariff universities by school type.

¹ Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A strategy for Social Mobility (April 2011). HM Government (Cabinet Office)
<http://download.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social-mobility/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf>

2. How to respond

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents and where applicable, how the views of members were assembled.

Responses to this consultation can be submitted by letter or email to:

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If you have comments or complaints about the way this consultation has been conducted, these should be sent to:

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A copy of the Code of Practice on Consultation is available from the following link:
www.bis.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf

3. Additional copies

You may make copies of this document without seeking permission. Further printed copies of the consultation document can be obtained from:

BIS Publications Orderline
ADMAIL 528
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An electronic version can be found at:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/c/11-965-consultation-statistics-disadvantaged-children-higher-education>

Other versions of the document in Braille, other languages or audio-cassette are available on request.

4. Confidentiality & Data Protection

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If you want information, including personal data that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

5. Help with queries

Questions about the policy issues raised in the document can be addressed to:

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A copy of the Code of Practice is available from the following link:
www.bis.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf

6. The proposals

The FYPSEC release is an Official Statistics publication, produced annually by BIS. The latest edition is available here: http://stats.bis.gov.uk/he/FYPSEC_2010_final.pdf. The main focus of the release was to present a headline metric that showed the proportion of young people from the top 3 and bottom 4 socio-economic classes who participate for the first time in full-time higher education.

However, there is general recognition that the FYPSEC measure is just one of a basket of measures that provide different statistical perspectives on the extent to which HE participation has widened in the United Kingdom. It was also apparent that there were underlying problems with using the Social Class (SEC) variable, particularly when the SEC variable was applied to individual age cohorts (18 year olds). For this reason, the FYPSEC release was supplemented with other Widening Participation summary statistics based on other descriptors of disadvantage. One key statistic was the number of young people progressing to Higher Education by FSM status. The most recent figures for both of these headline measures are shown in the table.

Academic Year	FYPSEC-18			The FSM measure		
	NS-SEC 1-3	NS-SEC 4-7	Gap	FSM	Non-FSM	Gap
2002/03	28.4	10.5	17.8	..	..	..
2003/04	26.0	11.1	14.9	..	..	..
2004/05	27.0	11.2	15.8	..	..	..
2005/06	28.3	12.7	15.6	13	33	20
2006/07	26.9	12.3	14.7	14	33	19
2007/08	26.7	12.9	13.8	15	33	18
2008/09	27.8	13.7	14.1	..	..	..

In addition to the FYPSEC and FSM measure derived from information shown for individual students the release also included some “HESA Performance Indicators” <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis>. These performance indicators help Officials assess how the population breakdown of individual institutions by disadvantaged background type shape up against benchmarks. These will continue to be published separately by HESA on an annual basis.

Source of the data

The key measures, FYPSEC and FSM measure, are compiled differently but rely on data secured from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record. The FYPSEC measure is derived using socio-economic class data on HE entrants from the HE student record and Individual Learner Record data, and also socio-economic class data from the Labour Force Survey. The FSM measure is derived using linked data from the National Pupil Database, the HESA student record and Individual Learner Record data. As statistical producers, we aim to maximise our access to, and, influence the development of, these datasets to enhance statistical outputs.

Data Users

The statistics are used widely within the Department and by a number of other government departments/bodies for policy development and evaluation, for parliamentary business and briefing, and for various other models and analyses.

They are used extensively by media organisations, local authorities and stakeholders within the HE sector. The published statistics often provide a starting point or background information for academics and research bodies.

Current policy themes

These widening participation metrics also have a wider significance as proxies for Social Mobility. The Government strategy was published in the “Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A strategy for Social Mobility” available here: <http://download.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social-mobility/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf>. Following this review, BIS analysts are in the process of developing metrics to be reported in the Official Release in August.

BIS analysts are proposing significant changes to this year’s Widening participation (formerly FYPSEC publication). The key proposals are:

Proposal 1 – methodological change (replace FYPSEC with the FSM measure)

- The “FYPSEC measure” to be removed from the core analysis because of residual issues with data quality and coverage. (The arguments for removal of this indicator are outlined in Annex A);
- The alternative “FSM measure” to replace FYPSEC as the primary indicator of HE progression among disadvantaged youngsters. (Annex B presents the strengths and weaknesses of this new Social Mobility metric);

Proposal 2 - changes to the format and contents of the publication

- A new table that extends our analysis of HE progression by local authority area level using the aforementioned FSM measure²; and

Proposal 3 – a new statistic on access to the higher tariff institutions

- A new table that reflects accessibility to the most competitive institutions for young people from state schools³.

² This bridges an important gap in data provision that has materialised since the dismantlement of National Indicator 106 and the closure of the Communities and Local Government Hub where the data was published.

³ This metric and the national FSM statistics have been identified as HE proxy measures of Social Mobility. The Government strategy was published in the “Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A strategy for Social Mobility” available here: <http://download.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social-mobility/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf>

7. Consultation questions

BIS would welcome any feedback from users of the publication, including any comments on the proposals made or any other general comments about how the publication could be improved.

Views are welcome from all users including officials from central and local government, and local authority representatives, academics, representative bodies, user groups and stakeholder bodies, media organisations, business owners and members of the general public.

Views are welcome on all aspects of the publication. The scope of the consultation covers the methodology used to produce the data, the scope of the publication, the way the data is presented and the format of dissemination.

BIS would be interested in receiving responses to the questions outlined below about these changes. When responding it would be helpful to refer to the question number. We also welcome other comments that fall outside the scope of these prescribed questions.

Methodology

Q1 - Do you agree that the data quality issues with the FYPSEC measure are sufficient to exclude it from the August 2011 publication and subsequent releases? (see Annex A)

Q2 - Are there any improvements to the FSM measure (Annex B) that you would wish to suggest?

Scope of the publication

Q3 - Does the standard table for Social Mobility metric 2 (Annex C) provide an adequate summary of the progress made in widening participation to the most selective institutions? Anything else that you feel could be included?

Q4 - Are there any additional series or breakdowns that you would like to see included in the August Release?

Presentation of the data

Q5 - Is the layout of the tables within the proposed release suitable and understandable (Annex D)?

Q6 - Are there any data within the releases that you think would benefit from being presented as a chart? If so, please specify which data sets and what types of charts would be most useful?

Q7 - Would a map showing FSM progression rates by region be useful?

Q8 - Should the local authority statistics show changes from the previous year?

Format and dissemination of the publication

Q9 - Are the PDF versions of the tables in the Release superfluous alongside the Excel versions? Is it useful to be able to download the tables in the release individually rather than all in the same workbook?

Q10 - Should the notes to editors be reproduced within the downloadable Excel/PDF tables?

8. What happens next?

The consultation closes on 1 August 2011. The results of this consultation will be published on the BIS consultation website. All feedback will be considered and implemented into the Widening Participation Official Statistics publication which will be published later in August 2011.

Annex A: Methodological note on Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC)

In 2007, the Department published a new measure of participation in higher education: Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC). This measure shows the initial participation rates in full-time higher education, of 18, 19 and 20 year olds from the top three and bottom four socio-economic classes. It also shows the gap between these two participation rates. FYPSEC covers English-domiciled students attending UK Higher Education Institutions and English Further Education Colleges and is based on the population of England.

Disadvantages of the FYPSEC measure

The FYPSEC measure does suffer from a number of weaknesses that have developed over recent years. For these reasons, BIS analysts are of the view that the FYSPEC measurement will not be sufficiently stable to reflect HE participation among disadvantaged groups over time. The main issues revolve around (i) the accuracy of the SEC variable and (ii) changes to the way SEC is reported.

- A significant proportion of students do not report their higher-earning parent's occupation, from which the socio-economic class is derived. In addition, as socio-economic class is derived from the student's view of their highest-earning parent's occupation, it can be subject to error on the part of the student or in the interpretation of the student's description of occupation.
- The measure is derived from a number of data sources and is therefore subject to some uncertainty and volatility. This casts doubt on how small year on year changes should be interpreted.
- For a significant proportion of students the SEC is unknown. This has been increasing over time. The coverage of the SEC variable is particularly poor for part-time students because the occupation information is obtained via the UCAS application form which is only used by applicants to full-time HE courses.
- Further changes to the SEC variable may be implemented in the future which could affect continuity. In 2008/09, there was a change to the wording of the question on which student's socio-economic class is based which created a discontinuity in the time series.
- The measure makes use of proxy data for the underlying population. When considering the relevant socio-economic class breakdown of the population, we look at the socio-economic class of the parents of 13, 14 and 15 year olds on the Labour Force Survey instead of parents of 18, 19 and 20 year olds. This is because the small number of 18-20 year olds who are included in the Labour Force Survey with their parents are predominantly those who are in full-time education. Therefore a sample based on these people would be heavily biased towards those who participate in higher education. So 13-15 year olds are used as a proxy for 18-20 year olds in this case. This removes the problems of bias and small numbers but does introduce some uncertainty in that a parent's occupation (and therefore socio-economic class) could change from the time their child is 13 to the time s/he is 18.

- In the HE student data, the “never worked and long term unemployed” category of socio-economic class is not really used. The FYPSEC methodology therefore does not take account of the size of this group in the underlying population. This approach could potentially introduce a bias to the figures during the recession, when this category is likely to grow, leading to difficulties with interpretation.

Annex B: Methodological note on the Free School Meal (FSM) measure

These inherent data quality issues with the socio-economic class variable have encouraged analysts to develop alternative measures to assess young entry into Higher Education for young people from low income backgrounds whilst circumventing some of the technical problems associated with the SEC variable. A recent development in higher education statistics is the matching of the National Pupil Database (NPD) to the Skills Funding Agency Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and the HESA Student Record, allowing progression from school to higher education to be tracked for the first time. This has enabled us to look at the background and prior attainment of higher education students in richer detail than before, and also to look at smaller areas (for example: Local Authorities).

This matched dataset has been used to produce progression rates to Higher Education by Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, both at national and at Local Authority level. The indicator was originally developed to track progress against the national “Narrowing the Gap” Public Service Agreement at Local Authority level and formed part of a set of 138 National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships. The proposal is that this measure is adopted for the publication to reflect progress in HE participation among low income groups, albeit a relatively narrow segment of the young population.

Definition

The indicator usefully reflects the gap between the proportions of 15 year olds eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those not eligible for FSM progressing to Higher Education by the age of 19. The indicator applies to young people who were in the maintained sector at age 15 only, but it covers both full-time and part-time study in Higher Education.

The measure has resonance among the public as FSM is a longstanding indicator of disadvantage. It was originally developed to track progress against the national “Narrowing the Gap” Public Service Agreement at Local Authority level and formed part of a set of 138 National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships. Young people with FSM are predominantly from jobless households and are regarded as a narrow but key target group for raising aspirations. The Department for Education have based their Pupil Premium on assessing schools where many young people take free school meals and the data item has been collected on the Pupil Level Annual Schools’ Census for many years. The statistic has also been used by Ministers to reflect access rates to the most selective institutions.

It is also a versatile measure as it can be disaggregated at local authority level (unlike FYPSEC) as well as at national level. For the last 3 years, local area data has been published on the Communities and Local Government data exchange Hub to service National Indicator 106. As the variable is available at individual student level, it can be matched to other young person characteristics i.e. prior attainment records. Recent figures show that 15 per cent of young people in England who were eligible for FSM at age 15 in 2003/04 had progressed to HE by age 19 in 2007/08. The equivalent figure for non-FSM pupils was 33 per cent, leaving a progression gap of 18 percentage points between the two groups.

Weaknesses of the FSM progression rate

There are however some difficulties with the FSM measure:

- By the time of publication, only four data points will be available (2005/06 to 2008/09) so only a limited data series is available.
- The nature of the matching process deployed ensures that there is a time lag between receipt of the latest HE data and publication of results because a matching process is deployed.
- The coverage of this measure is limited to young entrants, as there is limited matched data available (the earliest Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census (PLASC) data covers 2001/02, so Year 11 students in the earliest dataset can be tracked through to Higher Education from 2004/05). However, as more NPD-HESA-ILR data is linked, we will be able to track students entering HE in later years, i.e. age 20, 21 etc, but for the time being we are limited to HE entry aged 18 or 19.
- The FSM variable only tells us whether or not a pupil was actually in receipt of FSM. There could potentially be more pupils who would be eligible for FSM but who did not make any claim, therefore undercounting the number of students who were eligible for FSM.
- Those who were in receipt of FSM represent the poorest group of pupils (around 14% of pupils in our dataset were eligible for FSM). This measure does not allow us to separate out those whose families are between the poorest level and the 'average' level. This is clearly also a group which could potentially benefit from widening participation policies.

Despite these issues, BIS analysts consider that that the FSM measure is a better proxy of progress on WP than the FYPSEC measure.

- The eligibility for free school meals is a established variable that has been collected by the Department for Education for many years.
- A consistent time series.
- As a raw statistic, it is a measure that is easy to understand by technical and non-technical users alike. This is not the case with FYPSEC judged by user feedback.
- The FSM flag is easy to interpret as eligibility for FSM is based on strict financial criteria. Socio-economic class is more difficult to define.
- It captures a key target widening participation group. The vast majority of young people with free school meals reside in homes where the head of the household is jobless.
- Unlike FYPSEC, the figures can be disaggregated at local authority level. This data has helped local authorities assess the HE aspirations of their poorest young people.
- There is a strategic link with the Pupil Premium announced by the Department for Education. In October 2010, the Government announced that FSM eligibility would be one of the criteria by which funds would be allocated.

Annex C: Methodological note on measuring access rates to the higher tariff institutions

In April 2010, the Office of Fair Access commissioned a report “What more can be done to widen access to highly selective universities” www.offa.org.uk/wp-content. The Government are also committed to improving rates of access to the most competitive universities among disadvantaged youngsters as an important component of a wider strategy to improve levels of Social Mobility. The Government strategy was published in the “Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers”. A copy of the document is available here:

<http://download.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social-mobility/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf>

For this reason, BIS analysts in conjunction with the Higher Education Funding Council are developing an HE metric that reflects access to the most selective thirds of universities among young people from state schools. The metric highlights a cohort of students undertaking key stage 5 A level studies and reflects how many of these students progress to the most competitive universities. The metric will be sourced from the same matched NPD-HESA dataset that underpins the “FSM measure” with a view to publishing a baseline figure (2008/09) in this Widening Participation release. The broad construct of the headline metric is shown in the table below.

Identifying the most selective institutions

The most selective institutions can be defined in a number of ways. However, the ranking of institutions deployed for this metric draws on a specific measurement – the average UCAS Tariff scores of young entrants who have taken at least one Advanced level qualification or equivalent. Even within this narrow definition of attainment there are differing degrees of “academic” focus to define the intake of students that access selective Higher Education Institutions. This measurement reflects average Advanced level points per student based on the 3 highest scoring A levels regardless of course choice.

Progression to higher tariff universities by school type

	Key stage 5 pupils age 17 ¹	In Higher Education Institutions by age 19		Higher Tariff Institutions ²	
	Cases	Number	%	Number	%
Independent					
State school/colleges					
Total					

¹ Pupils who undertook at least 1 GCE/VCE A level or VCE Double Award

² Defined by average UCAS tariff scores (based on 3 Highest Advanced levels grades)

It is hoped that this metric will identify the extent to which young people in state schools are under-represented in higher tariff institutions and thereby encourage further analysis to assess why this entry gap emerges.

Annex D: Scope and contents of the publication

The proposed contents are:

Table 1

Time Series showing progression rates to Higher Education by age 19, broken down by FSM status, 2005/06 to 2008/09

	% entering HE by age 19		
	FSM	Non-FSM	All
2008/09			
2007/08			
2006/07			
2005/06			

Table 2

Local Authority breakdown of Table 1

Map 1

Annotated map showing overall progression rates for young people with FSM by local authority area

Table 3

Progression to higher tariff universities by school type

	Key stage 5 pupils age 17	In Higher Education Institutions by age 19		Higher Tariff Institutions	
	Cases	Number	%	Number	%
Independent					
State school/colleges					
Total					

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