

Research Briefing

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By Nerys Roberts; Paul Bolton

Educational outcomes of Black pupils and students

1

Summary and scope of briefing

This briefing looks at educational outcomes for Black school pupils at GCSE level, and progress into higher education and into the workplace. It focuses on pupils and students in England.

Most of the data discussed in this briefing is published by the Department for Education (DfE), the Office for Students (OfS) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Some of the analysis is for major ethnic groups, and some for minor ethnic groups. Major ethnic groups are broad categories such as Black, White, Mixed, Asian and Other. In the DfE data, the Black major ethnic group includes the Black African, Black Caribbean, and any other Black background minor ethnic groups.

At GCSE level, in 2022 to 2023 young people from the Black major ethnic group on average had a similar combined English and maths pass rate to those in the Mixed, Other, and White major ethnic groups. This is a change from pre-pandemic, when the pass rate for pupils from the Black major ethnic group was the lowest of any major ethnic group. GCSE data for 2022-23 referenced in this briefing is provisional and subject to later updating by the DfE.

Black African pupils generally fare better than Black Caribbean pupils, and Black pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) also attain better on some key GCSE measures than White pupils eligible for FSM.

In England, young people from the Black major ethnic group are more likely to go on to higher education than average, but less likely to obtain high grades, enter ‘prestigious’ universities, end up in a highly-skilled job, study further or have career satisfaction.

There are marked differences in higher education entry rates between people from different Black ethnic groups, and between men and women, although available data isn’t always further broken down by socio-economic status.

2 Schools

Schools in England are subject to equality duties to tackle discrimination and harassment, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics, including race.

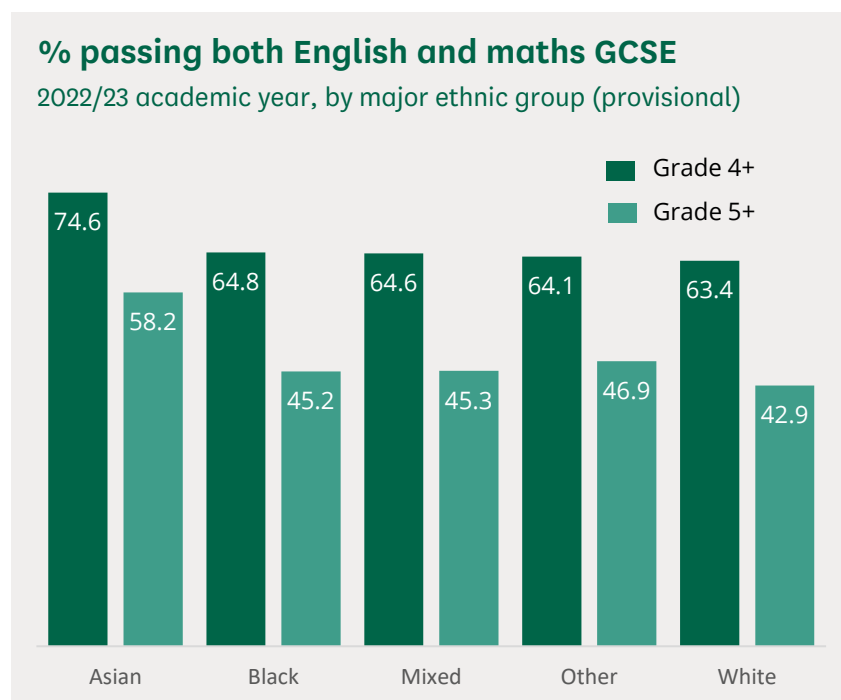
At school level, there’s no separate funding to address racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes. Grants that were historically separate, such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), have now been rolled up into schools’ and local authorities’ overall budgets, and funding is not generally ring-fenced for specific purposes. Schools and local authorities can decide how to spend the overall funding they receive.

Black pupils’ pass rate for GCSE English and maths combined has improved. In the 2018 to 2019 academic year, across the Black major ethnic group, 59% of pupils attained a standard pass in English and maths GCSE (grades 9 to 4, broadly equivalent to the old A* to C grading). This was the lowest rate for any major ethnic group.¹ However, this situation has changed more recently.

By the 2022 to 2023 academic year, pupils from Black, Mixed, White and Other major ethnic groups had similar pass rates for these two subjects combined; pupils in the White major ethnic group have the lowest pass rate on this measure. Asian pupils have the highest pass rates.² These pass rates, which are provisional and subject to later updating, are shown in the chart below.

¹ Department for Education, [Key stage 4 performance 2019 \(revised\)](#), 24 May 2022, “National characteristics tables” Excel file

² Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23 Key stage 4 performance](#), 18 October 2023, “2223_characteristics_summary_provisional.csv” file



Notes: Grade 4 is considered a standard pass and is equivalent to a low C grade. Grade 5 is considered a strong pass and equivalent to a high C or low B grade

In 2022/23, the Asian major ethnic group includes Chinese pupils

State-funded settings only

Source: Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23 Key stage 4 performance](#), 18 October 2023, "2223_characteristics_summary_provisional.csv" file

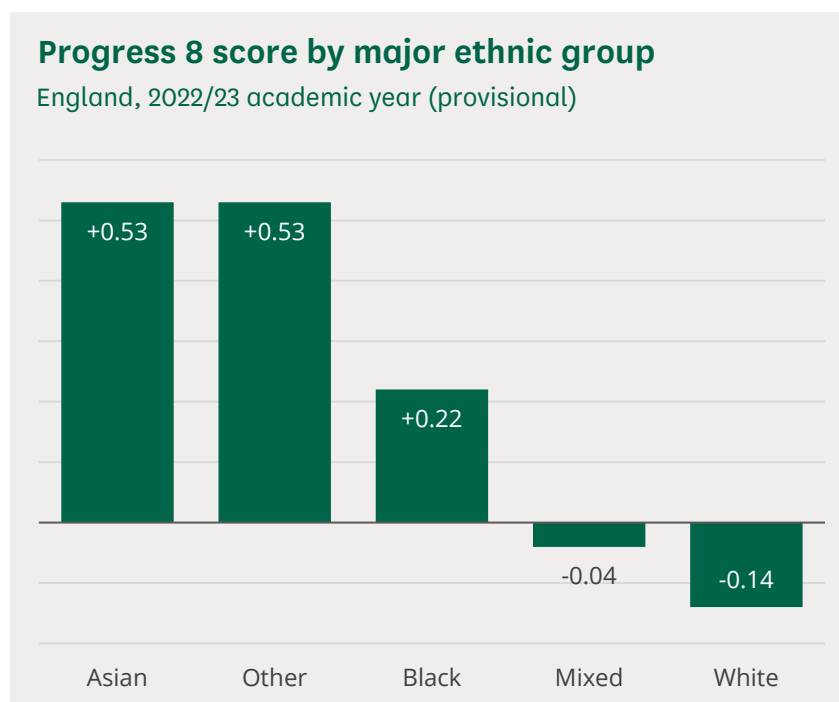
Another way of looking at school performance is to consider the progress schools make with their pupils between the end of key stage two (end of primary) and the end of key stage four (GCSE phase). The main measure for this is known as [Progress 8](#).

A positive Progress 8 score means that on average, a group of pupils makes more progress than peers with similar prior attainment nationally.

In the 2022 to 2023 academic year, White pupils made the least progress of any major ethnic group, at -0.14. Black pupils made more progress than average, at +0.22. Asian pupils and pupils from the Other ethnic group made the most progress (both +0.53).³

The chart on the next page illustrates the average Progress 8 scores for each major ethnic group.

³ Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23 Key stage 4 performance](#), 18 October 2023, "2223_characteristics_summary_provisional.csv" file



Note: in 2022/23, the Asian major ethnic group includes Chinese pupils. State- funded schools only

Source: Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23 Key stage 4 performance](#), 18 October 2023, "2223_characteristics_summary_provisional.csv" file

2.1

Looking at detailed characteristics reveals a more nuanced picture

In 2022 to 2023, 69% of Black African pupils attained standard passes in both English and maths GCSE, which is higher than the national average of 65%. However, Black Caribbean pupils had significantly lower pass rates, at 52%. Black African pupils also made more progress, with an average Progress 8 score of +0.37, while for Black Caribbean pupils the average score was -0.24.⁴

There are also gender disparities, mirroring trends seen nationally, where girls tend to outperform boys on most GCSE attainment measures. 46% of Black Caribbean boys attained GCSEs in both English and maths at grades 9 to 4, while the figure for Black Caribbean girls was 57%.⁵

Black pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) have a significantly higher pass rate for GCSE English and maths than the national average for FSM-

⁴ Department for Education, [Academic year 2022/23 Key stage 4 performance](#), 18 October 2023, "2223_characteristics_summary_provisional.csv" file

⁵ As above, "2223_national_char_data_provisional.csv" file

eligible pupils. However, Black FSM pupils, on average, still have attainment rates below the average for FSM-eligible peers from Asian backgrounds.⁶

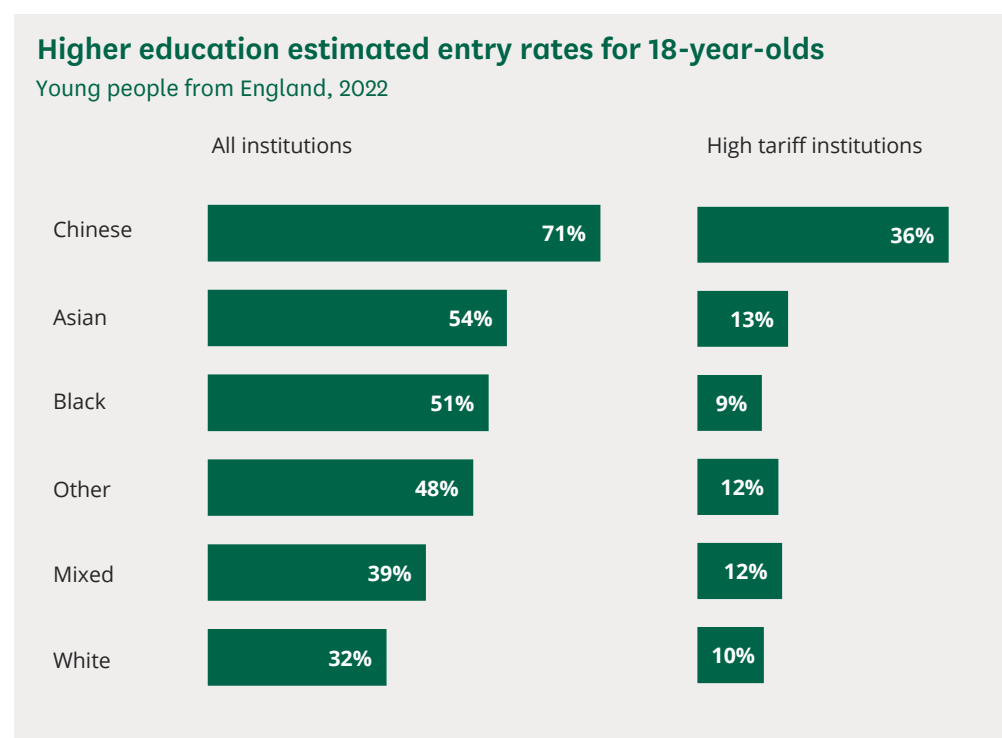
3 Higher education

3.1 Access to higher education has increased

The latest data on access to higher education is from the admissions service UCAS.

In 2022 just over 43,000 people from Black ethnic groups in England were accepted to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK. 34,500 were Black African, 6,700 were Black Caribbean and 2,100 were from other Black backgrounds. A further 9,000 people from mixed Black and White backgrounds were accepted. The 2022 total was a new record high.⁷

UCAS estimates higher education entry rates for different ethnic groups, which allow for comparison but only between broad ethnic groups. The chart below gives estimated entry rates for 18-year-olds.



⁶ Department for Education, [Key stage 4 performance 2019 \(revised\)](#), updated 7 September 2020: Table CH2.

⁷ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, [UCAS undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2022](#)

Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), [2022 End of cycle data resources, Sector-level end of cycle data resource csv files](#), 'NPD ethnic group entry rate.csv'; 'NPD ethnic group tariff group of provider entry rate .csv', updated 19 June 2023

51% of Black 18-year-olds across England were accepted to higher education in 2022. While this was lower than rates among 18-year-olds from Chinese and Asian ethnic groups, it was well above the levels for White and Mixed ethnic groups and the overall average (36%).

The entry rate for Black young people has increased from 28% in 2010, the largest increase in entry rate of any major ethnic group.

3.2

Entry rates to 'prestigious' universities are lower for Black entrants

UCAS breaks down entry rates by the 'tariff' level of different universities, between high, medium and low, which refer to average grades of students admitted.

High-tariff institutions are generally considered more prestigious and harder to get into. The earlier table gives entry rates to these institutions.

While 51% of Black 18-year-olds entered higher education in 2022, only 9% went to a higher tariff institution. This was the lowest rate of any ethnic group.

Another way of looking at this disparity is the **proportion of entrants** to higher education who got into a higher tariff institution. This was 19% for Black 18-year-olds compared with 51% of their Chinese contemporaries and 30% of their White contemporaries.⁸

⁸ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, [2022 End of cycle data resources](#), Sector-level end of cycle data resource CSV files, 'NPD ethnic group tariff group of provider entry rate.csv', updated 19 June 2023

3.3

Differences between Black ethnic groups entering higher education, by gender

[Data from the Department of Education](#) reports progression rates to higher education by ethnic group in more detail.⁹ This data looks at the proportion of young people from state-funded schools starting higher education by age 19.

This is given in the following table, which also breaks the data down by gender.

Progression to HE for Black young people				
% of pupils from state-funded schools starting HE by age 19, 2021/22				
		Female	Male	Total
Black	Black - African	79.0	63.2	71.2
	Black Caribbean	56.5	34.4	45.8
	Any Other Black Background	68.9	48.2	58.6
	Total	72.3	54.5	63.5
Mixed	White and Black African	64.1	45.7	54.8
	White and Black Caribbean	45.7	30.4	38.0
All ethnic groups		53.6	40.2	46.8

Source: Department for Education, [Academic year 2021/22. Widening participation in higher education](#), 13 July 2023, "fsm_gender_ethnicity file"

These rates are somewhat higher than UCAS's because they include students entering higher education at age 19, not just at age 18. In 2021/22 64% of Black young people had started higher education by age 19.

The higher education progression rates for mixed White and Black young people were lower than for young people from the Black major ethnic group, particularly White and Black Caribbean, at 38%. More than two thirds of Black African young people went to higher education, well above the national average across all ethnic groups (47%). The rate in the Black Caribbean group was lower at 46%, so slightly below the national average.

Progression rates were significantly higher among women in all Black minor ethnic groups, and Mixed White and Black groups. The gender gap among Black Caribbean young people was larger than for any other ethnic group, at

⁹ Department for Education, [Academic year 2021/22. Widening participation in higher education](#), 13 July 2023, "fsm_gender_ethnicity file"

22 percentage points. The next largest gender gap was in the any other Black background group, and then in the mixed White and Black African group.

Just 6.7% of Black Caribbean young people progressed to higher education at a ‘high tariff’ institution. This was half the average rate across all students (13.4%) and the lowest level of any ethnic group other than Gypsy/Roma and Traveller groups.¹⁰

3.4 Black students are less likely to stay in higher education

While entry rates to higher education are higher among Black young people than for some other ethnic groups, retention rates and degree outcomes are generally lower than average. The Office for Students (OfS), an independent regulator of higher education, publishes [annual data for these indicators](#).¹¹

The information below on continuation rates, degree classifications, and progression into careers or further study relates to full-time undergraduate students in England.

The chart on the next page summarises the most recent data on retention, degree class and progression to highly skilled work, further study or other positive outcomes. The latest progression and retention data is for 2020 to 2021, and the latest data on outcomes (degree class) is for 2021 to 2022.

¹⁰ Department for Education, [Academic year 2021/22, Widening participation in higher education](#), 13 July 2023, “ethnicity_csv” file

¹¹ Office for Students, [Access and participation data dashboard](#), updated 6 July 2023

More black students leave their studies, and fewer gain the highest grades

% of full time undergraduates, 2020/21 and 2021/22, England



Source: Office for Students, [Access and participation dashboard](#), updated 6 July 2023

In 2020 to 2021, the continuation rate was lower for Black students at 84.3% than for students from other major ethnic groups. For students from the Mixed major ethnic group, the rate was 87.9%, for Asian students it was 88.7%, and for White students, it was 90.1%.¹²

Results gap

According to the OfS, Black graduates were less likely to gain a first or upper second class degree than graduates from other major ethnic groups. 63.1% of full-time Black undergraduates did so in 2021 to 2022, which was nearly 10 percentage points less than for the major ethnic group with the next lowest rate.

Careers after higher education

The OfS also publishes data on whether students have progressed to managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes 15 months after they left higher education.

¹² Office for Students, [Access and participation data dashboard](#), updated 6 July 2023

In 2020 to 2021, 71.3% of Black graduates from full-time undergraduate courses were in one of these activities compared with 75.5% of Mixed, 72.0% of Asian and 74.9% of White graduates.¹³

A survey in 2020 of graduates 3.5 years after completing their studies found that Black graduates were less likely to be satisfied with their careers than graduates from other ethnic groups.¹⁴ Among graduates aged 25 or under at the start of higher education, 80% of Black Caribbean and 82% of Black African respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with their careers. This compares with 88% of White graduates.

The gap was even larger among those who were older than 25 when they began studying: 74% of Black Caribbean and 73% of Black African graduates were satisfied with their careers compared with 87% of White graduates. These gaps are smaller, but still statistically significant after other factors such as sex, prior qualifications and deprivation are controlled for.

¹³ Office for Students, [Student outcomes data dashboard](#) ('detailed data' and 'progression' tabs), 30 September 2022

¹⁴ Higher Education Statistics Agency, [Higher education outcomes: How career satisfaction among graduates varies by ethnicity](#), September 2020

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