



Department
for Education

Post-16 Education Outcomes by Ethnicity in England

Topic Note

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Central Analysis Division, Department for
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About this document

Ensuring that the education system works for pupils from all backgrounds is key to the Department of Education's aims. This document collates and contextualises available evidence on outcomes by ethnicity across the post-16 education system in England. Doing so allows for a rounded view of the data in proper context, and overall trends to emerge.

This document primarily draws on Department for Education publications, and data releases by the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Post-16 outcomes by ethnicity are studied in a wide range of sources, and this document does not seek to be an exhaustive account of key facts from that literature. This paper reports descriptive statistics only and does not attempt to assess the impact of various causes, such as cultural differences, geographic variation, or prior attainment.

This document does not consider the impact of COVID-19 on different ethnic groups. Ethnicity will continue to be examined as a factor in relevant COVID-19 research by the Department.

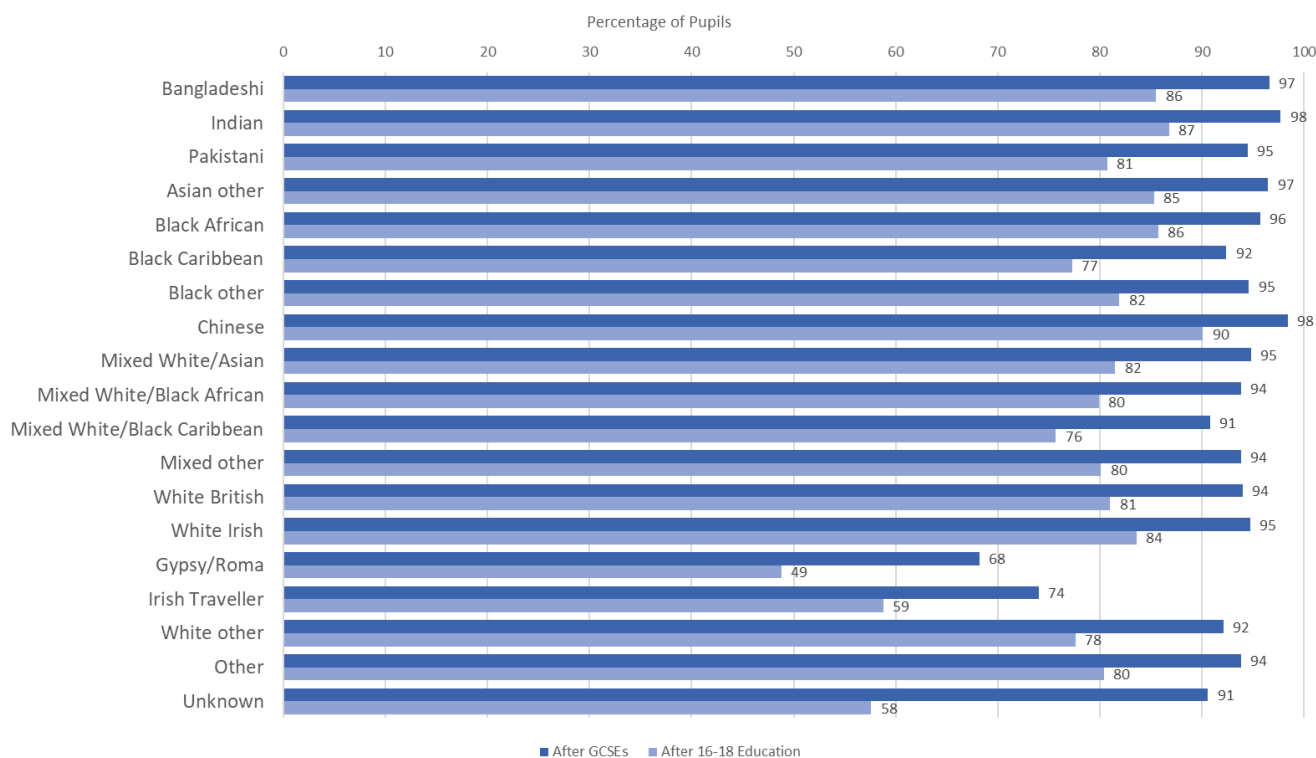
Executive Summary: 7 Key facts about Ethnicity and Post-16 Education Outcomes

Nearly all pupils go into employment, additional education or training following KS4, as required by law¹. This is true across ethnic groups, with the exception of Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller pupils.

1. At age 16, 94% of all pupils go directly into some form of employment, education, or training². This rate is over 90% in all ethnic groups, except for Gypsy, Roma (68%) and Irish Traveller (74%). This can be seen in Figure 1.

2. Following 16-18 study, around 4 in 5 pupils go into employment, education, or training³. There is some variation by ethnicity, with 87% of Indian pupils compared to 78% of other white pupils going into one of these pathways. Gypsy, Roma (49%) and Irish Traveller (59%) pupils remain the most significant outliers.

Figure 1. Pupils (%) entering continuous Employment, Education or Apprenticeship by Ethnic Group



¹ [Update to Participation Statutory Guidance FINAL \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

² [Key stage 4 destination measures, Academic Year 2019/20 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

³ [16-18 destination measures, Academic Year 2019/20 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

Pupils from a Black Caribbean background are less likely to be in employment, education, or training than the national average.

3. At 91%, mixed white/black Caribbean pupils are the least likely large group (excluding Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups) to be in some form of employment, education and training following Key Stage 4. The national average is 94%.
4. 76% of mixed white/black Caribbean pupils and 77% of black Caribbean pupils are in some form of employment, education or training following 16-18 study. This compares to a national rate of 81% which is reflected across large groups, as seen in Figure 1.

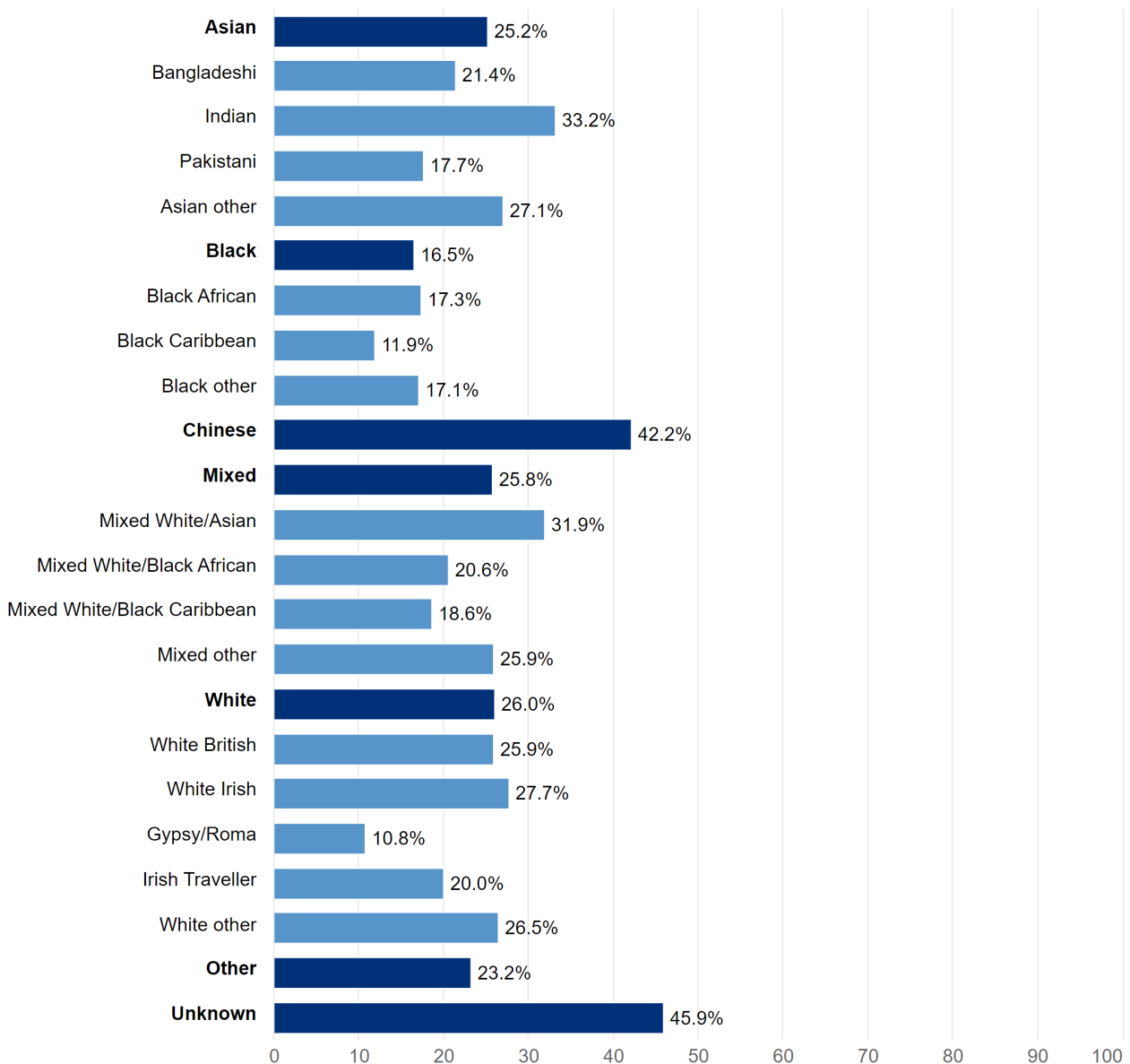
A-level pupils in Pakistani, Bangladeshi and all black groups are less likely to get top results than their peers from other ethnic groups.

5. The proportion of students receiving at least 3 As at A-level by ethnic group is split into two distinct groups, as seen in Figure 2. In white (excluding Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups), Indian, Chinese, and mixed white/Asian groups over 1 in 4 pupils taking A-levels achieved these grades.⁴
6. With the exception of white British Students, the above groups were also the highest performing groups at KS4. white British students who enter A-level exams are in line with the higher-performing groups, having been less high performing at prior levels of education. This is likely driven in part by white British students opting out of A-levels at higher rates.
7. Black, mixed white/black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups had significantly lower proportions of pupils receiving at least 3 As at A-level, ranging from 11-21%. Average A-level results are also lower in these groups.
8. Black, Pakistani, mixed white/black Caribbean and Irish Traveller pupils who take A-level exams average a low B grade, below the national average. Gypsy, Roma pupils are the only group to average a C grade.⁵

⁴ [Students getting 3 A grades or better at A level - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/ethnicity-facts-figures/ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

⁵ [Average score for students taking A levels and other qualifications - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/ethnicity-facts-figures/ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

Figure 2. Percentage of pupils getting at least 3 A grades at A level, by ethnicity



Source: [Students getting 3 A grades or better at A level - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

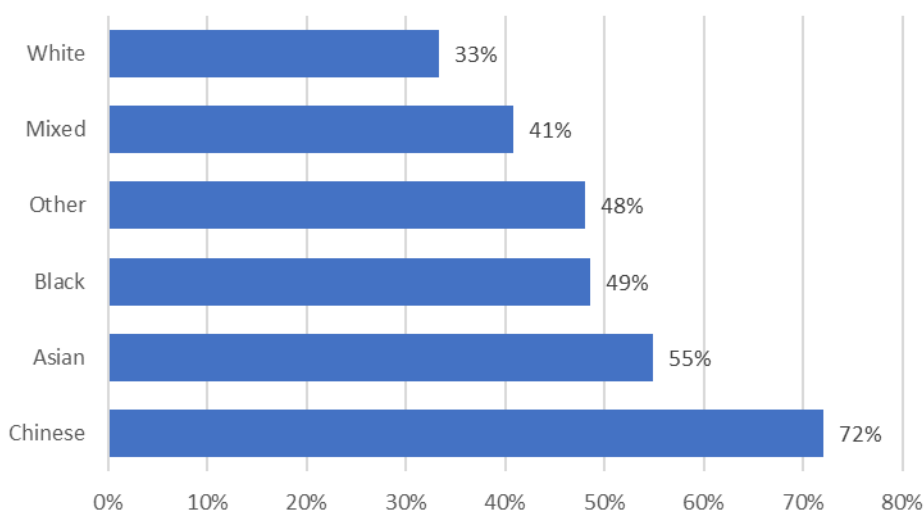
Entry rates to higher education are more than twice as high for students in the Chinese ethnic group compared to white students.

9. As a group, Chinese pupils have consistently been the highest ranked group in terms of progression to university (72% in 2021), 17 percentage points higher than the second highest ethnic group reported by UCAS, Asian pupils (excluding Chinese pupils).

10. White pupils are the least likely to enter higher education at 33%. This is driven by lower overall numbers of applications, not a lower acceptance rate. Figure 3 shows the wide range of entry rates by ethnicity.

11. Chinese pupils are the most likely to be accepted into high tariff universities (40%), at almost three times the rate of Asian pupils excluding Chinese pupils, the group with the second highest acceptance rate (14.2%). The rates of entry into high tariff institutions are discussed further below and seen in Figure 11.

Figure 3. 18-year-old entry rate into higher education by ethnic group



Source: UCAS [end of cycle report](#), 2021

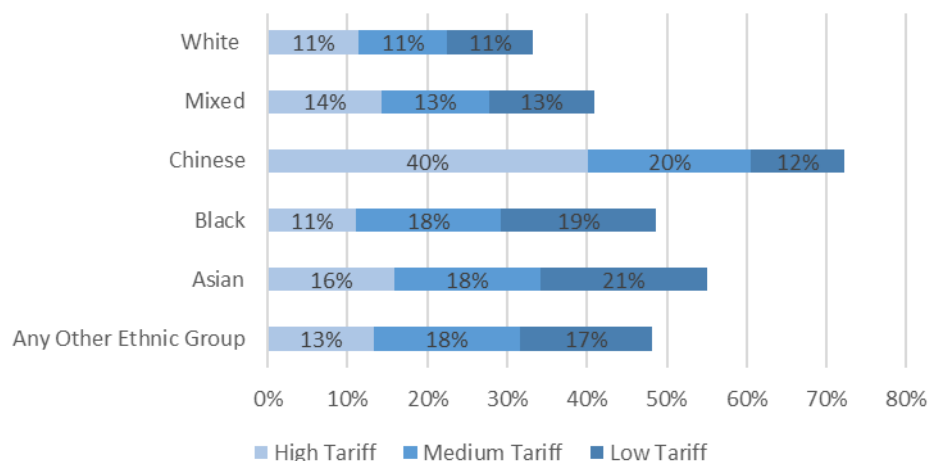
Asian and black pupils are twice as likely to attend a lower tariff university as white pupils.

12. As seen in figure 4, the entry rate to lower tariff institutions was around twice as high for Asian (20.9% of all Asian 18-year-olds) and black (19.4%) pupils when compared to white pupils (10.8%). These are the institutions with the lowest entry requirements.

13. Asian and black pupils are more likely to attend a lower tariff institution than a higher tariff institution; 20.9% to 15.8% for Asian pupils, 19.4% to 11.1% for black pupils.

14. White and mixed pupils have similar entry rates across all tariff providers, while Chinese pupils are almost four times more likely to enter a higher tariff institution compared to a low tariff institution; 40.1% to 11.7%.

Figure 4. Proportion of the 18-year-old population accepted to institutions by Ethnic group and entry tariff, 2021



Source: UCAS [end of cycle report](#), 2021

Students from Asian and black African backgrounds are most likely to study ‘high earnings potential subjects’ at university.

15. Asian and black African students are most likely to take subjects associated with higher lifetime earnings such as business studies, computing and law.

16. White British, black Caribbean and black other groups are conversely more likely to study subjects associated with lower lifetime earnings, such as creative arts.⁶

White British pupils opt out of higher education and into apprenticeships at higher rates than their peers.

17. White British (4.9% of all white British pupils), mixed white/black Caribbean (3%) and Irish Traveller groups (6.3%) are the groups most likely to be in sustained apprenticeships in the year following Key stage 4, measured by 6 consecutive months of participation in an apprenticeship at any time. No more than 3% of pupils from any other group participate in apprenticeships in the year following Key Stage 4.⁷

18. Following 16-18 study, 11% of Irish Traveller, 10% of white British and 7% of both mixed white/black Caribbean and white Irish pupils began apprenticeships. Other groups typically have 5% or fewer of pupils starting apprenticeships. This is in addition to the higher rates starting apprenticeships following Key Stage 4 described above.

19. White British and mixed white/black Caribbean pupils are among the least likely to continue to university following 16-18 study, with fewer than half of pupils (42%)

⁶ [The returns to undergraduate degrees by socio-economic group and ethnicity \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

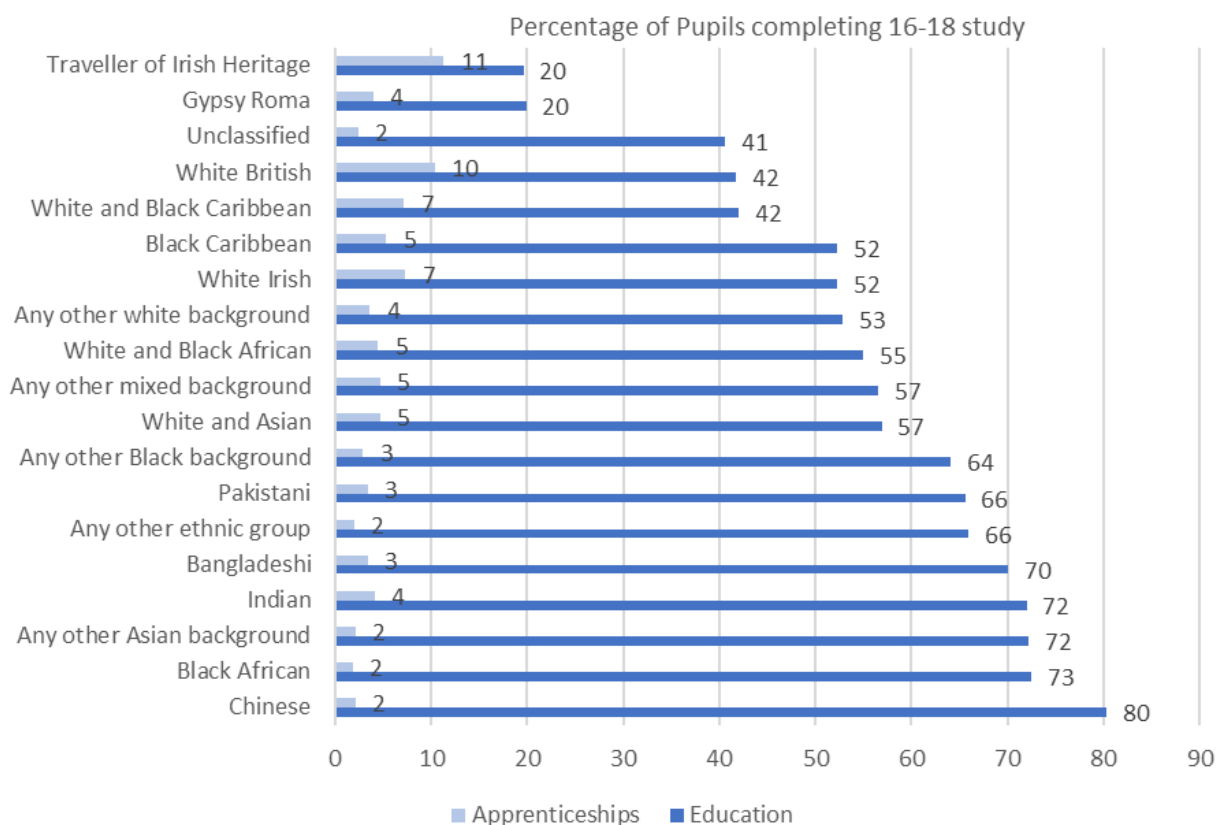
⁷ [Key stage 4 destination measures, Academic Year 2019/20 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

continuing in full-time education in both of these groups. This rate is lower than most other ethnic groups, as seen in Figure 5.

20. White pupils apply to university at significantly lower rates than all other aggregate ethnic groups according to UCAS⁸. Across white groups, 42% of pupils apply compared to an average of 60% across all other groups. University admissions data is explored in more depth [below](#).

21. White adults are also less likely to participate in adult (19+) education and training excluding apprenticeships than a number of other groups. 62.5% of learners describe their ethnicity as white⁹, compared to a population estimate of 84.8%¹⁰. Direct comparisons are difficult as the majority of learners in adult education and training are not recent school leavers (75.9% are 25 years-old and over) so numbers cannot be compared to population estimates for a specific age cohort.

Figure 5. Pupils (%) entering Apprenticeships or Education following 16-18 study by Ethnic Group



Source: [16-18 Destination Measures, 2020](#)

⁸ [UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021 | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

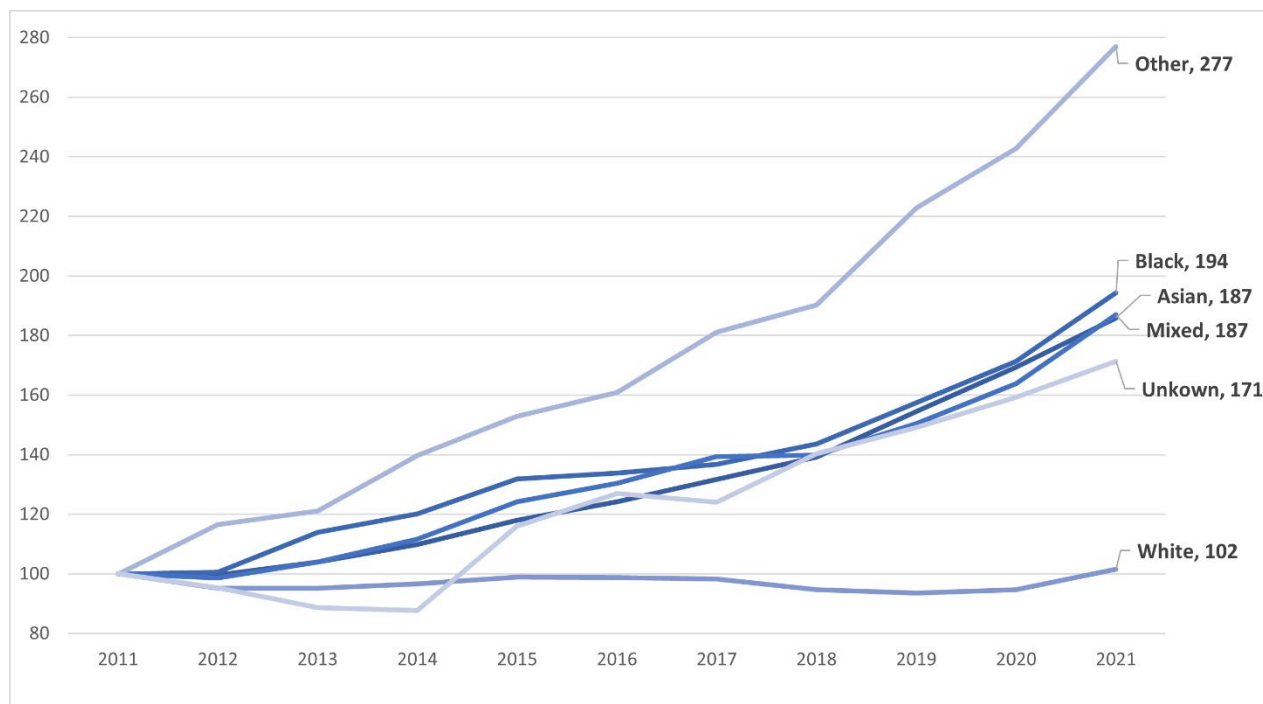
⁹ [Further education and skills, Academic Year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [Population estimates by ethnic group, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

University Applications deep dive

22. In the 2020 HE application cycle in England, the number of non-white applicants continued to grow, while applications from white pupils stayed at a similar level. Figure 8 shows the application growth rates over time.

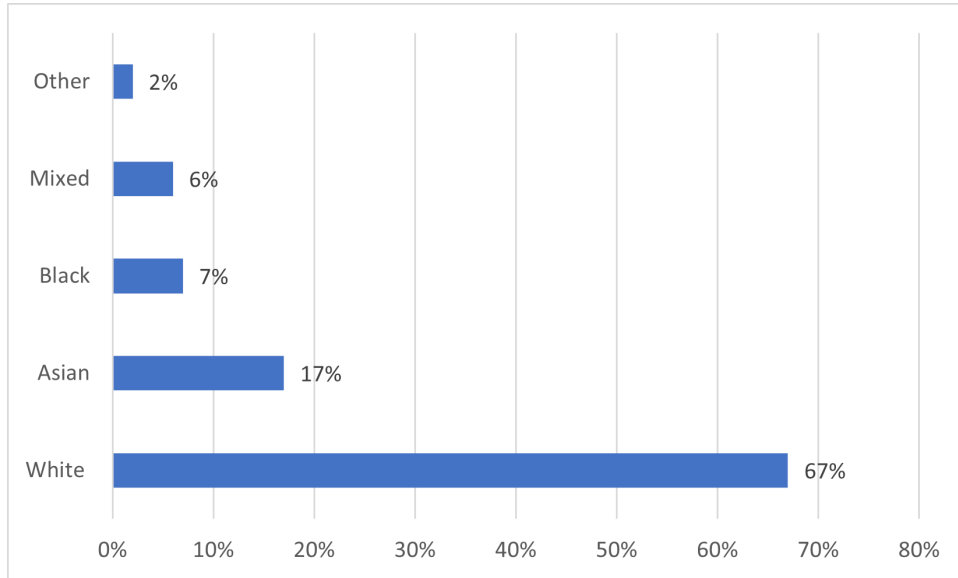
Figure 6. Index rate based to 2011 showing growth to 2021 of applicants to UCAS in England for 18 year olds



Source: [UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021 | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

23. Overall, just over half (50.3%) of 18-year-olds applied to attend HE through UCAS in 2021. The majority of these pupils were white (67%). The ethnic breakdown is shown in figure 6. The majority of pupils applying to HE are white and this is driven by the large size of this group within the population.

Figure 7. 2021 England 18-year-old applications through UCAS by Ethnic Group

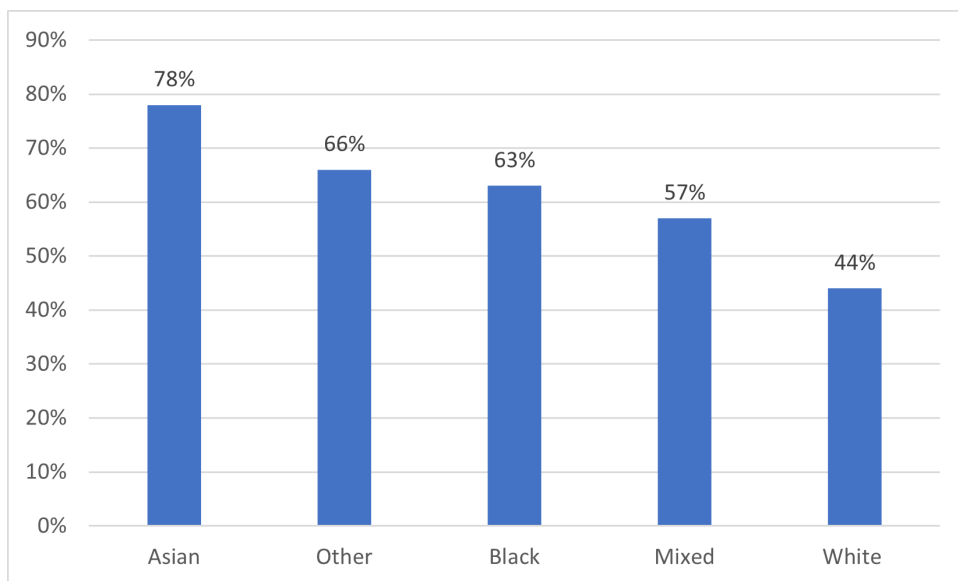


To note, figures do not sum to 100 due to rounding

Source: [UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021 | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

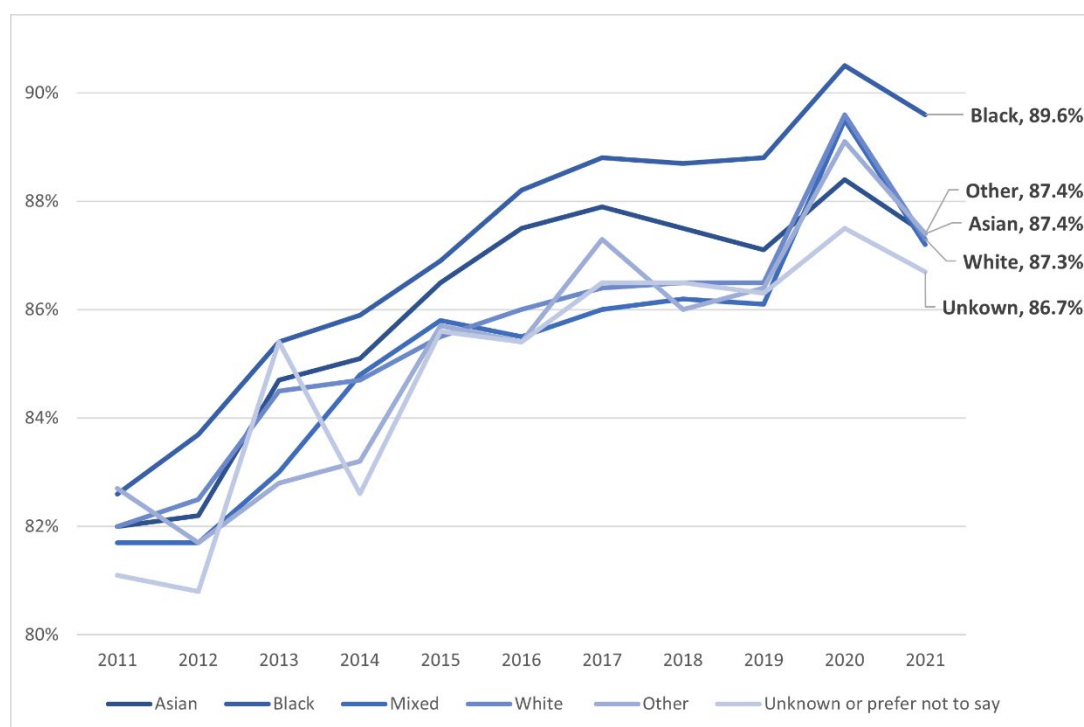
24. Asian pupils were most likely to apply to Higher Education with just over three-quarters of the population (78%) applying, while the white ethnic group were the least likely with 44% applying. Figure 7 shows the proportion of each ethnic groups population in England aged 18 in 2020 that applied through UCAS.

Figure 8. Proportion of each ethnic group aged 18 that apply to HE through UCAS 2020 England



25. Acceptance rates of university applicants had risen for all ethnic groups in the decade to 2020, then in 2021 there was a drop in acceptance rates for all groups. As seen in figure 9, the range and ordering of acceptance rates has remained largely the same. Acceptance rates are broadly similar across all ethnic groups.

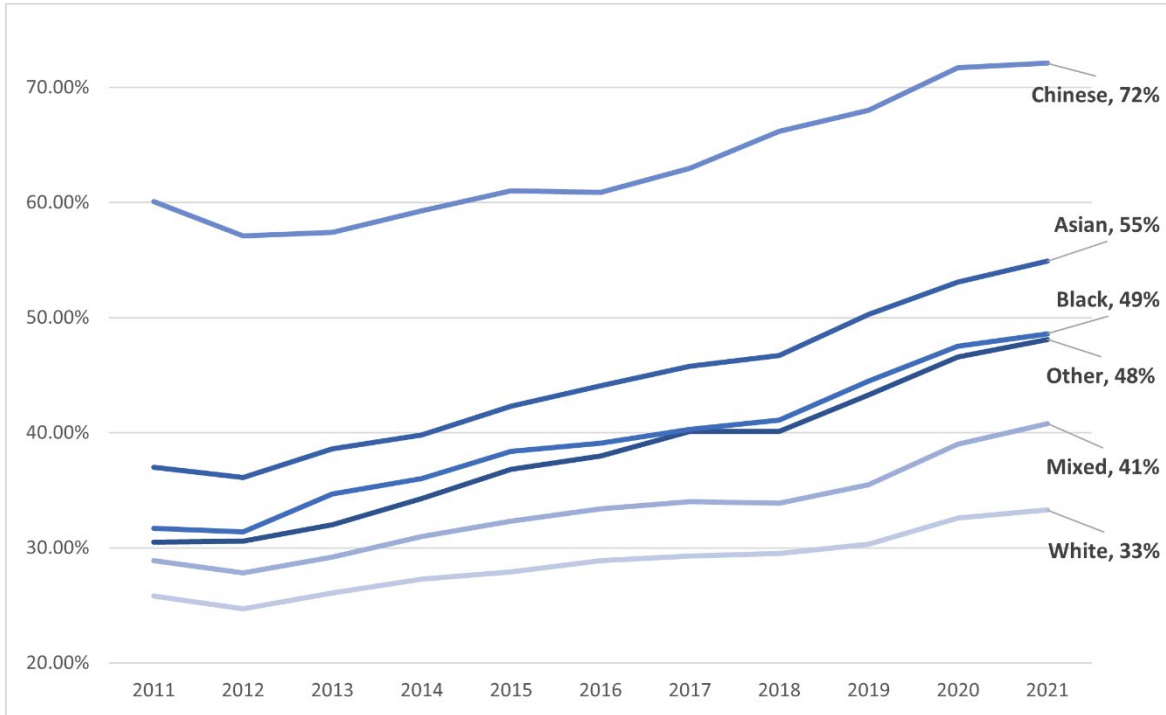
Figure 9. 2011-2021 acceptance of 18-year-olds in England



26. Given that acceptance rates across ethnic groups are broadly similar, the wide variation in the proportion of pupils gaining a place at university is largely driven by differences in application rates. As a result, relative to the 18-year-old population, Chinese pupils have the highest university entry rates and white pupils have the lowest, among aggregated groups.

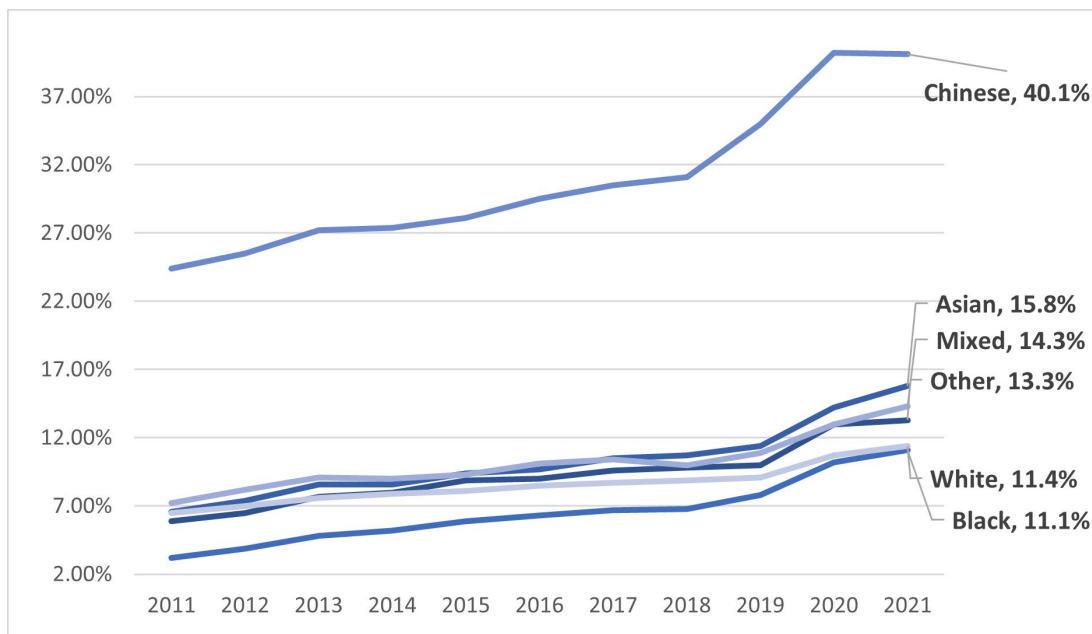
27. As acceptance rates have risen, the entry rate for all groups has also increased between 2011 and 2021, as seen in figure 10. White pupils had the lowest entry rate in 2011 and have seen the lowest growth since then.

Figure 10. UCAS, 18 year old entry rate by ethnic group



Source: [UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021 | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

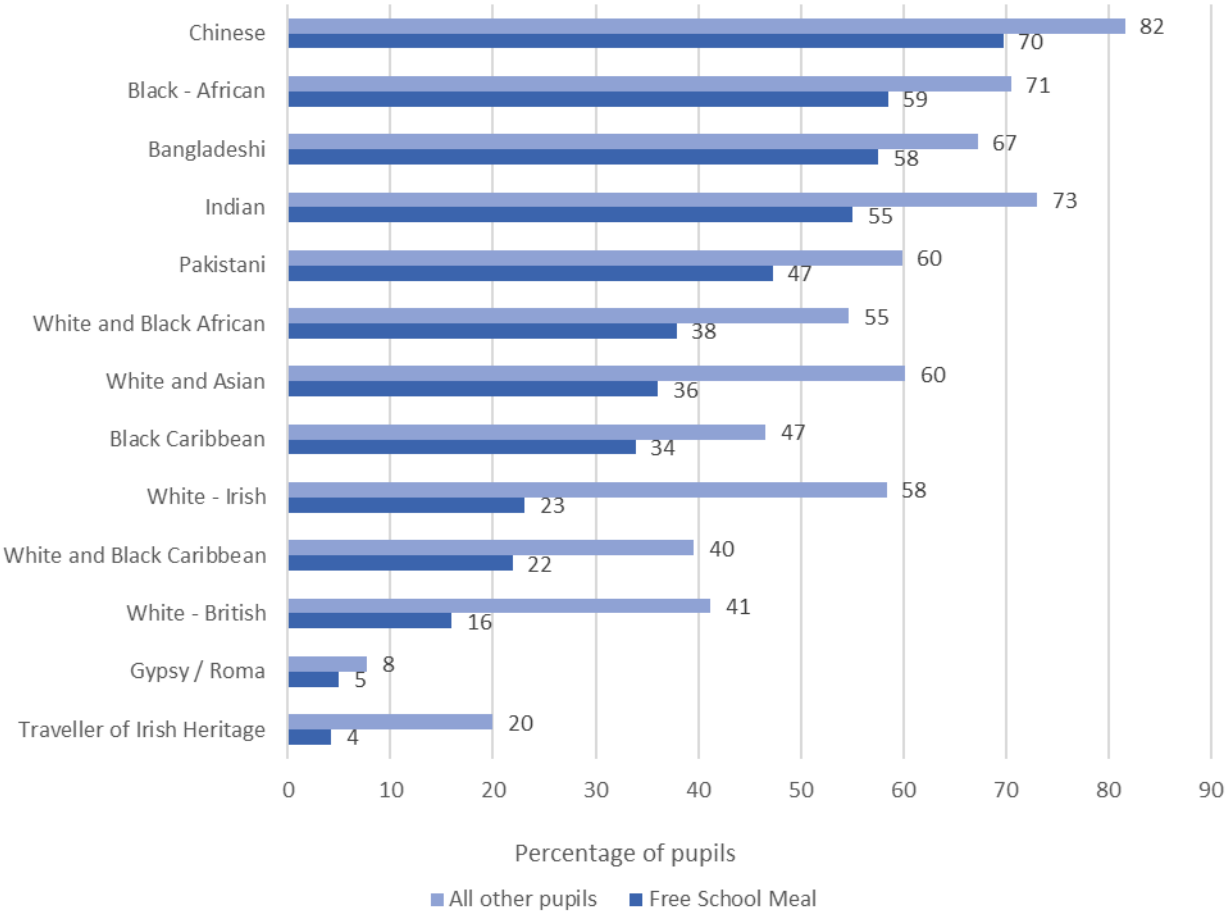
Figure 11. UCAS, Proportion of the England 18 year old population who were accepted to High Tariff providers by ethnic group



Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals

28. Overall, pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) were 19.1 percentage points less likely to progress to higher education than those not eligible for FSM. The gap in progression rates for FSM and non-FSM eligible pupils was largest in the white British and white Irish groups as seen in figure 12.

Figure 12. Progression to HE for FSM and non-FSM pupils by ethnicity, 2019/20



Source: [Widening participation in higher education: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

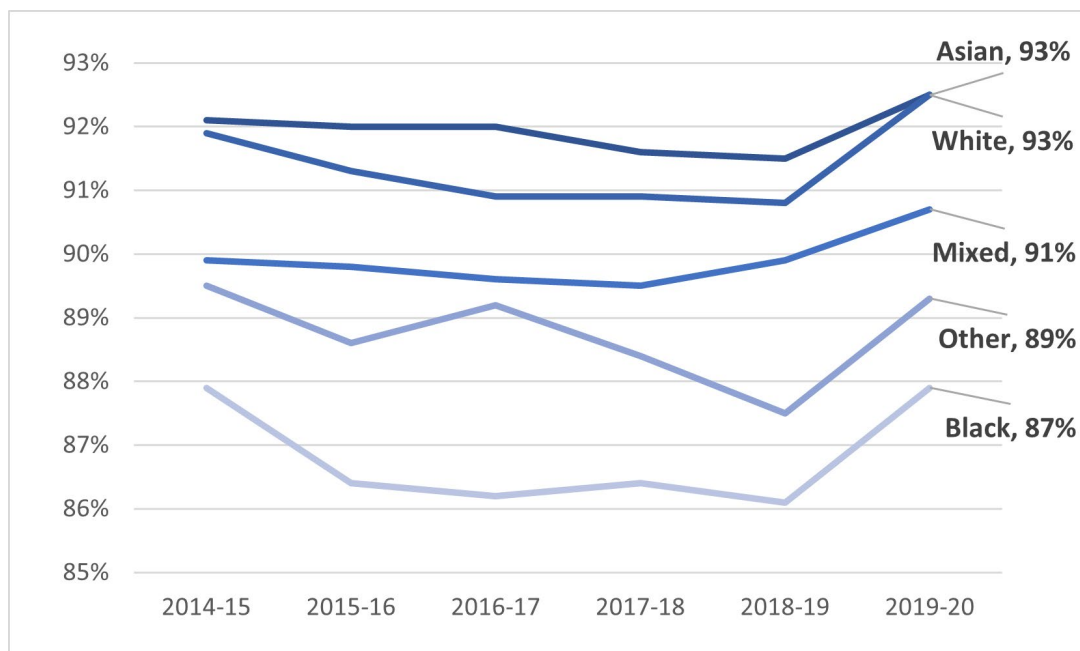
Continuation rates

29. Among students who enter university, white students are the most likely to continue their first degree (joint with aggregated Asian group in 2020) and the most likely

to achieve a 2:1 or higher, while black students were the least likely to achieve either of these.¹¹

30. Continuation rates for both apprenticeships and undergraduate degrees are the lowest for black pupils while white and Asian pupils have the highest rates, as seen in figure 13.

Figure 13. OFS First Degree or full-time apprenticeship continuation rates by ethnicity, 2014/15-18/19



Source: [Access and participation data dashboard - Office for Students](#)

¹¹ [Access and participation data dashboard - Office for Students](#)



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