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

2008 Update: DIUS Commentary

Department for
**Innovation,
Universities &
Skills**

DIUS today published the latest update to the Full-Time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) measure. This shows the participation rates of young people in England, from the top three and bottom four socio-economic classes, who participate for the first time in higher education, together with the gap between the two rates.

DIUS Commentary

2006/07 was an exceptional year in the higher education sector, due to the significant changes brought about by the introduction of variable fees and the new student support package. We expected, and saw, a drop in student numbers that year, following record numbers in the preceding year.

The drop in the participation rates by socio-economic class has been anticipated, although it is heartening to see that the lower socio-economic classes show a much smaller drop than the upper socio-economic classes, resulting in an apparent narrowing of the gap.

However, due to the exceptional nature of the 2006/07 academic year we are treating these findings with caution, and will refrain from drawing conclusions, on variable fees or other policies, based on the 2006/07 figures alone. We will consider the longer-term effects of our policies as and when later figures become available.

We are already seeing the position recover from 2006/07:

- According to UCAS figures, 307,000 applicants from England have been accepted for entry in 2007, a rise of 6% from 2006. This is the highest figure ever.
- The proportion of accepted applicants from England who are from the bottom four socio-economic classes increased from 31.7% in 2006 to 32.1% in 2007.
- And the latest applicant figures for 2008 entry show that applicants from England are again up by 6%.

BACKGROUND

Latest findings

The latest findings are as follows:

Over the period 2002/03 to 2006/07, full-time young participation for the top three socio-economic classes fell from 44.1% to 39.5%, while for the bottom four socio-economic classes this has increased from 17.5% to 19.0%.

Between 2005/06 and 2006/07 the participation rates both decreased (from 42.8% to 39.5% for the top group and from 19.8% to 19.0% for the bottom group). This was expected, as we anticipated and saw a large increase in applications and acceptances in 2005/06 in advance of the introduction of variable tuition fees, and a corresponding decrease in 2006/07.

Caveats

The Department makes use of this measure to inform on progress on widening participation in higher education. However there are a number of caveats to the measure which are outlined in the publication, together with advice for interpretation as follows:

The FYPSEC measure contains a number of weaknesses and as such should be interpreted carefully. It is recommended that the figures are used to provide trend information (i.e. change over several years) rather than fixing on year-on-year changes. Drawing conclusions from figures for individual years is not advised.