

Geography of Geography: the evidence base

**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



A report to better understand who is (and is not) studying geography at GCSE, A Level and university in England.

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2020**

Introduction

To better understand who is (and is not) studying geography at GCSE, A Level and university in England, and who is progressing (or not), the Society commissioned the FFT Education Datalab (Philip Nye, Natasha Plaister and Dave Thomson) to undertake a study on the uptake and progression of students studying geography at GCSE, A Level and undergraduate level. This involved analysing and linking data from the Department for Education National Pupil Database, and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student records.

These analyses provide an evidence base to inform and guide actions and interventions by the Society, university geography departments, schools and the broader geographical community to support schools and students to enable greater diversity and inclusivity in terms of those who study and practice geography.

The approach

The study was initiated in 2018; data and reports were received in late 2019. Information on schools (establishment type, governance, region) as well as students (gender, ethnicity, disadvantage, prior attainment) were considered. Data have been normalised by national trends relating to access and progression for all students, to identify differences in patterns for those selecting (or not selecting) geography. Given the source of the data the focus is on England; comparable studies are needed for the devolved nations of the UK. Gaps in data are largely attributable to information not available from the data sources used for independent schools.

The full suite of reports with analyses are provided online:

1. Data and Methodology
2. Entries and attainment in GCSE geography
3. Entries and attainment in A Level geography
4. Progression from GCSE to A Level geography
5. Entries to undergraduate geography degrees
6. Progression from A Level geography to higher education
7. Mobility of A Level geography students to study at university

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Key findings at GCSE

1. In England, entries into geography GCSE have increased strongly since 2010 (169,000 in 2010 to 239,000 in 2018), at a time when the age 16 population decreased¹. Entries received a boost from 2010 onwards with the inclusion of geography GCSE (alongside history) as a 'humanities' choice leading towards the English Baccalaureate in English maintained schools.
2. This increase in entries came predominantly from groups who had been less likely to take geography GCSE previously – notably, disadvantaged pupils, BAME students, and those with lower prior attainment.
3. Increasing entries in the state sector more than offset declining GCSE entries in the independent sector² between 2010 and 2017³.
4. Attainment in geography GCSE fell as the range of pupils entering the qualification increased – evident at both the 9-7 (formerly A*-A) and 9-4 (formerly A*-C) attainment levels.
5. Over the period 2010-18, greater regional stratification in grades awarded in geography GCSE is evident, with attainment in London, the south east, the south west and the east of England consistently above that of other regions.

¹ Candidate numbers for 2019 for England, Northern Ireland and Wales combined were 265,000; we await 2020 data.

² During this period many independent schools moved away from GCSE to 'IGCSE'. The latter are not recorded in the annual reporting of GCSE entries, hence much of the decline in the independent sector.

³ GCSE entries in the independent sector recovered slightly in 2018, as independent schools returned to the reformed, 9-1 GCSE, after having moved over to international "IGCSEs".

Pupil characteristics

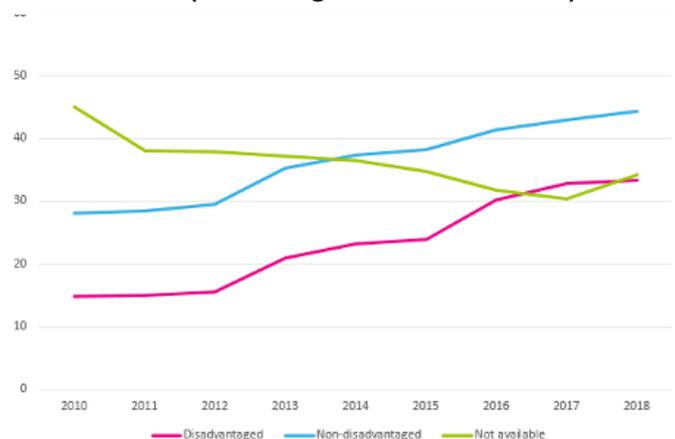
Gender

6. A small gender gap in geography GCSE entries has existed and remained reasonably stable over the period. In 2018, 43% of boys and 39.4% of girls took geography GCSE.
7. The gap is reversed when considering attainment. When looking at the grade 4/C or above, girls outperform boys by 6.6 percentage points.

Disadvantage

8. GCSE geography entries are lower for disadvantaged pupils (those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years) than for non-disadvantaged pupils.
9. This gap has narrowed, however, from a high of 14.4 percentage points in 2013 and 2015, to 11.1 percentage points in 2018. The introduction of the Progress 8 performance measure has given schools a strong incentive to enter pupils for English Baccalaureate subjects.
10. Entries from those for whom no disadvantage information is available (almost exclusively in the independent sector) have fallen for much of the period looked at, before reversing this trend a little in 2018 – something that may be explained by independent schools returning to the GCSE from unregulated international GCSEs, with the introduction of the reformed, 9-1 GCSE.

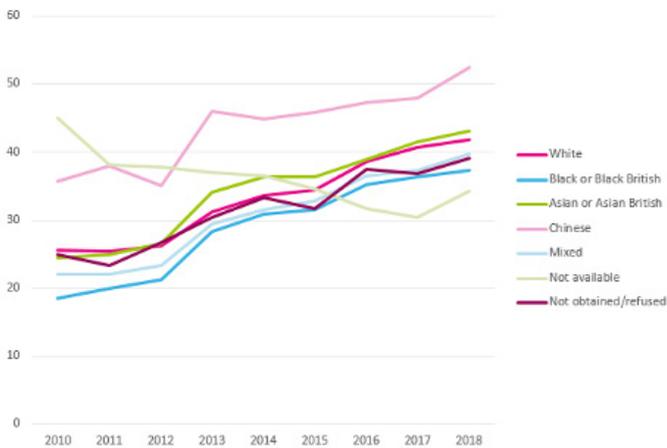
Entries (Percentage of student cohort)



Ethnicity

- Analysed by ethnicity, there are some clear differences in entries and attainment. Those of Chinese ethnicity have the highest entry rate (52% in 2018) into geography GCSE – most likely reflecting that this is a high attaining group, who are more likely to be taking academic subjects such as those which count in the English Baccalaureate.
- The proportion of entries by Black/Black British pupils has doubled from 2010 to 2018 rising from 18.6 to 37.3%.

Entries (Percentage of student cohort)



School characteristics

Region

- Entry rates have equalised a little when broken down by region, with the overall growth in entries post-2015 at least one factor in this.
- When attainment is considered, the most notable trend is the separation of the regions into two distinct groups, with London, the south east, the south west and the east of England having attainment at least some way above that of all other regions in the years from 2016 onwards. This is a pattern observed for other subjects too - high level of Key Stage 4 attainment overall for London over the last decade is by a well-documented phenomenon.

Area type: Coastal, Opportunity areas

- The proportion of GCSE entries in coastal areas has effectively matched that for non-coastal areas from 2016 onwards, closing a small gap that had been present since at least 2010⁴.
- The effect of the expansion of geography GCSE post-2015 is seen most starkly in the analysis by opportunity area⁵. While attainment started below that for non-opportunity area parts of the country, these attainment gaps have particularly increased since 2015 for all three of the measures looked at – attainment at the grade 7/A or above, attainment at the grade 4/C or above, and average point score.

Free school meals

- In the period since 2010, GCSE geography entry rates have increased for schools in all quintiles when analysed by free school meals eligibility rates, but the increase post-2015 is most noticeable for schools with the highest free school meals rates (Q4 and Q5). This reflects the observation made before about more rapidly rising entry rates for disadvantaged pupils.
- Attainment rates follow predictable patterns, with one of the notable features being the size of the gap between the schools with the fewest pupils eligible for free school meals (Q1) and the next group (Q2). Also notable is the drop off in attainment from 2016 onwards in the quintiles representing schools with the highest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. This is where there has been the biggest expansion in geography entries, suggesting that in these schools it is likely to be lower attaining pupils who are now newly sitting GCSE geography.

⁴ While coastal areas are worthy of attention, with low attainment known to be an issue in some coastal communities, there are also a large number of coastal communities in which this is not the case.

⁵ Opportunity areas are identified by the Department for Education as areas in which social mobility is particularly poor.

Admissions policy, Governance

19. Entry rates for all elements of the state sector have increased since 2010 – with the greatest increase post-2015 in comprehensives and secondary moderns⁶. These are the types of schools where there was the greatest scope for increase.
20. The GCSE entry rate for independent schools have declined since 2010, but increased again in 2018. The likely explanation is a switch to GCSEs, after years of increasing international GCSE entries.
21. Attainment patterns show grammar schools and independent schools achieving much higher results than secondary moderns and comprehensives, as expected given the high prior attainment of their intakes.
22. When looked at by governance rather than admissions policy, declining attainment levels are a feature generally. Attainment appears to have held up relatively well for community schools, but it needs to be borne in mind that the community schools with the lowest Key Stage 4 performance will in many cases have converted to sponsored academy status over the period looked at.

Inspection rating

23. Entry patterns and attainment analysed by inspection rating show a very similar picture to that when analysed by schools free school meals quintile.
24. Schools with outstanding Ofsted ratings have the highest geography GCSE entry rates in 2018. The gap in attainment is large. 32.5 percentage points between a school rated outstanding and one rated inadequate at the grade 4/C or above threshold. This differential has increased over the period looked at.



⁶ <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>

Key findings at A Level

Numbers

25. From 2010-2018, entries in geography A Level have increased from around 28,500 to 30,000, over a period with a drop in the age 18 population and a small fall in the number of A Level students. The share of A Level students taking geography increased from 10.7% in 2010 to 11.3% in 2018. 2019 candidate numbers for England, Northern Ireland and Wales were ~35,000. We await final data for 2020.
26. Growth in entries from those with the highest prior attainment has not been as strong as for those slightly lower down the prior attainment range (grade B or above 55.3% in 2018 compared to a high of 59.4% in 2011 and 2012, and grade A or above of 25.3% versus a high of 31.5% in 2011). This is likely to explain much of this decline in A Level attainment. The 2018 examination was also the first year of the reformed A Level specifications which included new content and the introduction of the independent investigation.
27. A pronounced dip in attainment occurred between 2017 and 2018, when there was a corresponding decrease in geography entries. This decrease in entries was driven largely by a reduction in entries in the independent sector.



Pupil characteristics

Gender

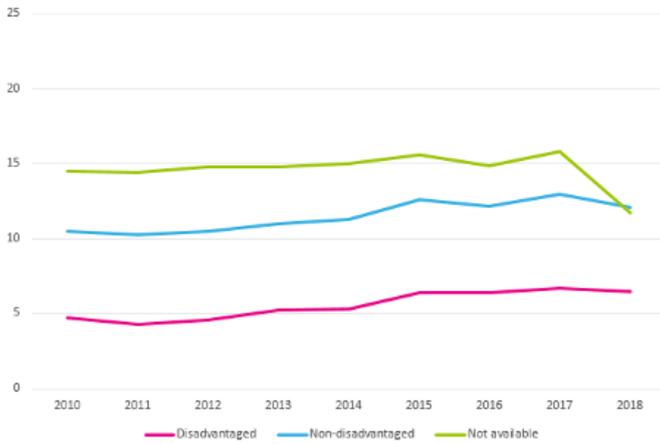
28. Between 2010 and 2018, there has been a halving of what started out as a sizeable gender gap in A Level geography entry rates (3.6 percentage points in 2010 - 12.6% of male students taking A Levels took geography, versus 9% of female students. This reduced to 1.7 percentage points in 2018 (12.3% versus 10.6%). Compared to other subjects, however, geography is one of the most gender balanced A Levels.
29. Over the same period, a gender gap in attainment in favour of female students has persisted. A gap of 3.7 points was present in 2018 – equal to a little more than a third of a grade.

Disadvantage

30. There is a stark gap in entry rates between students who were disadvantaged during their final six years in education up to age sixteen⁷ and those who were not disadvantaged – although the gap in 2018 was the lowest it has been in the period 2010 to 2018. In 2018 it stood at 5.6 percentage points (12.1% of non-disadvantaged A Level students entering geography, versus 6.5% of disadvantaged students). This is down from a high of a difference of 6.3 percentage points the previous year.
31. Attainment gaps at grade B or above and grade A or above were also some way smaller in 2018 than had been the case in preceding years. 24% of non-disadvantaged students achieved a grade A or above, compared to 15.2% of disadvantaged students – a gap of 8.8 percentage points. The narrowing of the gap is even more pronounced when considering attainment at grade B or above.

⁷ Free school meals are not available post-16, therefore disadvantage can only be considered based on data up to age 16. See the methodology document for further details.

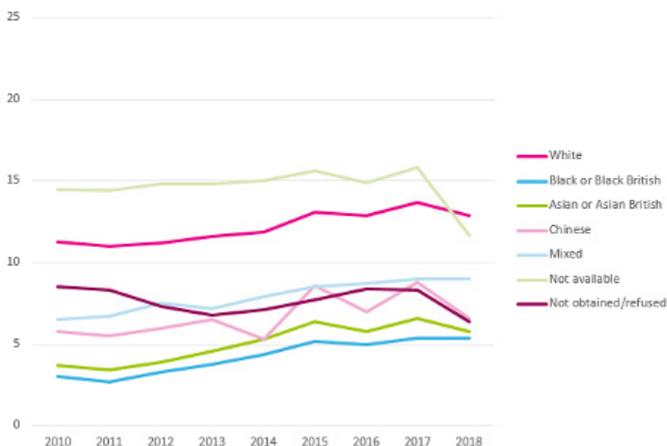
Entries (Percentage of student cohort)



Ethnicity

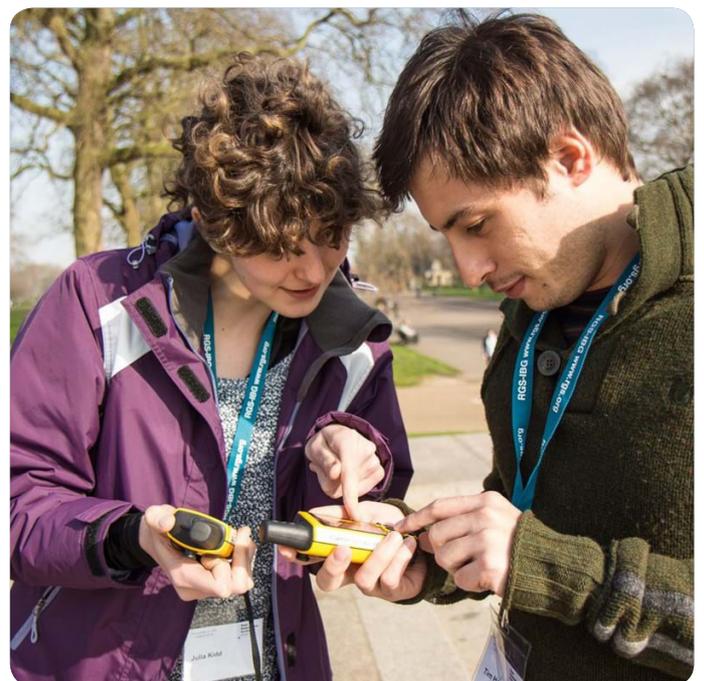
32. There are fairly sizeable disparities in A Level geography entry rates when considered by ethnicity, though disparities in attainment are less noticeable.
33. Entry rates for all major ethnic groups have increased over the period since 2010, with more than 5% of A Level students in each ethnic group taking geography in 2018. This was not the case in 2010 for Asian/Asian British or Black/Black British students.
34. Differences in attainment between ethnic groups are small, particularly when average point scores are considered. The exception to this is the Black/Black British group, for whom attainment is some way below that of other groups. This mirrors patterns also evident in other subjects. Attainment for this group also appears to have dropped more between 2017 and 2018 than was the case for students of other ethnicities.
35. The group for whom ethnicity data is not available will almost exclusively be in the independent sector.

Entries (Percentage of student cohort)



Prior attainment

36. Prior attainment in English and maths at GCSE has historically been a strong predictor of likelihood to take geography A Level. In 2010, 12.8% of those with prior attainment equal to a grade A or above entered geography A Level. Entry rates for those with prior attainment between grade B and grade C was some way lower, at 8.6%.
37. By 2018, entry rates for those with prior attainment in the A-B range were the highest, with entry rates for those with prior attainment of grade A or above and those with prior attainment of grade B-C converging. Much of this convergence took place in 2018 and is likely largely explained by a shift away from geography A Level by the independent sector, where prior attainment rates tend to be highest.
38. Entry for those with prior attainment of below grade C at GCSE remains low⁸.
39. Attainment rates are strongly tied to prior attainment, and have been over the whole period under consideration. It is noteworthy, however, that it is among those with the highest prior attainment, grade A or above, where there has been the greatest decline in geography A Level attainment.



⁸ Many schools will not allow a student to progress onto an A level unless they have at least an A or B grade at GCSE.

Establishment characteristics

Region

40. Geography A Level entry rates vary quite considerably by region, with London's rate of 8.6% and the south west's of 14.4% at the extremes in 2018. The same regions were also the highest and lowest, with a similar gap between them, in 2010.
41. There is less difference in attainment, particularly when looking at average point score, which takes account of students across the entire ability range. London has the highest average point score – of 37.5 in 2018, equal to a little below a grade B. This has been the case for every year in the period under consideration.

Area type, Coastal, Opportunity area

42. While there are reasonably sizeable differences in entry rates for geography A Level when considered by area type (urban/rural classification), only very small differences exist when considering average point scores of each of these area types. This suggests that students of similar ability are accessing geography A Level in all types of area.
43. There is an attainment gap between coastal areas (defined as those within 5.5 km of the coast) and non-coastal areas. In terms of average point scores this stood at 1.4 points in 2018. This is fairly small, at a little more than a tenth of a grade, and the smallest over the period considered.
44. Similarly, students in opportunity areas have attainment that is a little below that of students in other parts of the country.



Establishment type, Governance

45. Entry rates differ quite notably by establishment type, with independent schools having particularly high rates, at above 15% of all A Level students in all years except 2018.
46. Students in school sixth forms have also had high entry rates over the period under consideration, with a large gap persisting between this group of establishments and sixth form colleges and further education colleges.
47. In 2018 there was a large drop in entry rates from independent schools and colleges, from 16.5% of A Level entrants to 12%. Given the high attainment of those attending independent schools this shift away from A Level geography by the independent sector is likely a large contributory factor to the dip in attainment seen overall in geography A Level in 2018.
48. Students in the independent sector have attainment that is markedly above that for students in other establishments. There is relatively little difference in attainment between students at school sixth forms and sixth form colleges, though a larger gap between these two types of establishment and further education colleges. This reflects different levels of prior attainment for the students attending these different types of establishment.
49. There are relatively few entries from students in sponsored academies that offer post-16 provision.
50. Attainment rates also differ by governance, in ways that to a large extent are likely to be explained by different levels of prior attainment at different types of establishment.

Inspection rating

51. Ofsted ratings are only available for state establishments. These are fairly strongly tied to both entry rates and attainment, with outstanding establishments having the highest entry rates. Perhaps most notably when analysing attainment by inspection rating, those establishments judged to be good have attainment broadly on a par with those judged to be outstanding.

Progression from GCSE to A Level

52. Does the propensity to enter A Level geography vary by pupil characteristics and geography? Are some groups of pupils less likely to progress to A Level geography? Are there regions where this is more, and less likely, to occur? To answer these questions, the probability of each pupil entering A Level geography based on Key Stage 4 attainment (both overall and in GCSE geography), gender and type of school attended (independent or state) was modelled and compared with the actual percentage who entered.
53. Fewer disadvantaged pupils entered A Level geography than expected: 2.0% of disadvantaged pupils in the cohort would have been expected to progress based on prior attainment, gender and the type of school attended but only 1.4% did so.
54. Apart from white pupils, fewer pupils of all (known) ethnicities entered A Level geography than expected. The greatest disparities existed for Asian/Asian British and Chinese pupils, where 1.6 percentage points fewer pupils entered than would have been expected (entry rates of 3.5% versus an expectation of 5.1%, and 6.7% versus 8.3%, respectively).
55. Gaps in entry rates by area type were relatively small, with only those living in 'urban major conurbations' less likely to enter A Level geography than expected;
56. Larger gaps were seen in the analysis by area demographics – ranging from 0.9 percentage points more students than expected taking A Level geography in areas with a 'countryside living' demographic (7.7% of all students, versus an expectation of 6.8%) to 0.9 percentage points fewer students than expected taking A Level geography in areas with a 'multicultural living' demographic (2.6% versus 3.5%);
57. Those in coastal areas and government opportunity areas are slightly less likely to take A Level geography than would be expected given their prior attainment, gender and the type of school they attend;
58. Converter academies, which generally started as high-performing community schools, are the only type of school in which more pupils take A Level geography than expected, when schools are considered by governance type.



Entries to undergraduate geography programmes

59. Over the period 2005 to 2018, entries to geography degrees have increased from 6,043 to 7,247.⁹ This has not been a steady increase; there was a fall of 1,337 students (19%) between 2012 and 2013.
60. From 2008 onwards, the completion rate for degrees has been fairly steady at around 85%.¹⁰

Student characteristics

Gender

61. The proportion of geography undergraduates who were female¹¹ increased from 47% in 2005 to 56% in 2018. Since 2010, it has increased every year.
62. In every year considered, a higher proportion of female students went on to complete their degree than other students. For example, 88% of female students who began their degrees in 2015 had completed by 2018, compared to 84% of other students.

⁹ Geography entrants in a particular year is defined as the number of students who began a degree in the relevant year.

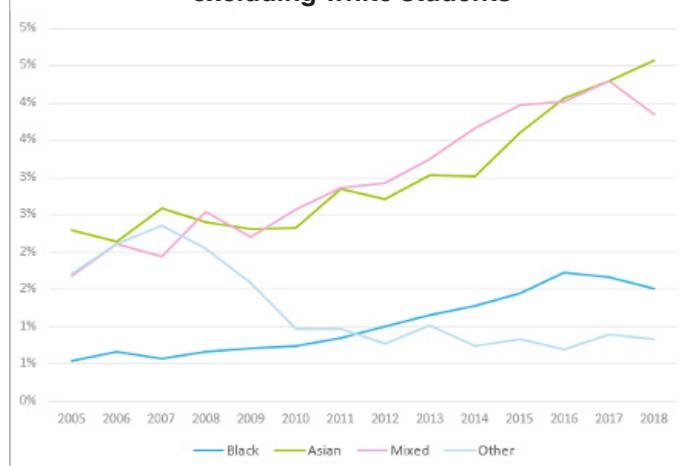
¹⁰ The dip in 2016 (see excel sheets) is explained by students who began four year degree courses in that year, who would not have come to the end of their courses by the time the latest HESA data was published, or students who took more than three years to complete their degree for other reasons, rather than by an actual fall in completion.

¹¹ Gender is categorised here in two groups: female and not female. The 'not female' category includes all students who did not identify as female. See the methodology document for more details on the categorisation of gender.

Ethnicity¹²

63. The majority of geography students were white, 88% in 2018. The next largest ethnic group was Asian students, who made up 5% of entrants in 2018.
64. Between 2005 and 2018, the number of Black students more than tripled, and the number of Asian and mixed students more than doubled. The proportion of students who were white fell from 93% in 2005 to 88% in 2018¹³.
65. Generally, white students were slightly more likely to complete their degree than students from other ethnic groups, with the exception of Black students. Black students were much less likely to complete than students from any other group; in 2018, only 66% completed their degree, compared to a completion rate of 86% for all students.

Entries (Percentage of student cohort), excluding white students



¹² Some restrictions are placed on the publication of data and statistics from the National Pupil Database. In particular, data based on ten or fewer individuals is 'suppressed': the exact number, and any statistics based on that number, cannot be published to avoid possible disclosure of information on individuals. Suppression has been applied to data in the ethnicity section.

¹³ The school-age population has been getting more diverse during this period.



POLAR¹⁴

66. A lower proportion of geography undergraduates came from areas in the first quintile than in any other quintile; this was consistently around 6-7% between 2005 and 2018. The lowest point came in 2012. The proportion of students from the highest quintile increased from 38% in 2005 to 41% in 2018.
67. Generally, the higher the quintile, the more likely a student was to complete their degree. Of those students who started a geography degree in 2015, for example, 78% of students in the lowest quintile completed their degree by 2018, compared to 88% of students in the highest quintile.

¹⁴ Participation of local area (POLAR) classification measures the proportion of young people from an area who participate in higher education. Here, we have split areas into five groups, or quintiles. The first quintile includes students from areas with the lowest participation, and the fifth the students from areas with the highest participation.

IDACI¹⁵

68. A higher proportion of geography undergraduates (36% in 2018) come from the least deprived quintile than any other. The proportion of students from the most deprived quintile is lower than that from any other, although it has increased in the years since 2012, when it was at a low of 5%, to 7% in 2018.
69. Similar to the pattern seen with POLAR quintiles, students from the lowest (most deprived) quintiles were less likely to complete their degree than the least deprived. Of those students who started a geography degree in 2015, 78% of students in the lowest quintile completed their degree by 2018, compared to 88% of students in the highest quintile. Coincidentally, these proportions are the same as those for the highest and lowest POLAR quintiles.

¹⁵ The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) is a commonly used measure of the deprivation of children in an area. Specifically, it measures the proportion of children (defined as those between 0-15 years old) living in income deprived families. Here, as with POLAR classification, we have split areas into quintiles. Quintile one includes students from the most deprived areas, and quintile five the least deprived.

Prior attainment

Qualification type

70. In every year considered in this report, 2005 to 2018, the vast majority of geography undergraduates had completed an A Level in geography in England¹⁶. The proportion has fallen slightly, from 89% in 2005 to 86% in 2018. A similar trend can be seen in the proportion of students with at least one A Level in any subject; this fell from 95% to 90% over the same period.
71. The number of students with vocational qualifications increased from 2005-2018, although it remains low; only 585 students, 8% of entrants, had some sort of vocational qualification in 2018.

Attainment

72. Mean attainment at A Level rose each year from 2005 to 2012, after which it fell each year until 2017. In 2018, the geography attainment measure was marginally smaller than in 2017.

¹⁶ As our analysis is based on the NPD, which only covers England, it is likely that some additional students completed A Levels elsewhere; in Wales, for example. See the detailed document for more information.

Establishment characteristics

HEI group

73. The majority of geography students, 64% in 2018, went to top third ranked universities, and a large proportion (51% in 2018) went to Russell Group universities. A substantial proportion attended University Alliance institutions, although this proportion has fallen from 22% in 2012 to 16% in 2018. Attending universities in the other groups was unusual, with only 3%, 3% and 4% attending Guild, Million+ or Cathedrals universities in 2018 respectively.
74. Students who studied geography at Russell Group or top third universities were more likely to complete their degree than those who studied at a university in one of the other groups.

School type

75. Schools types considered are: selective state schools, non-selective state schools, independent schools, sixth forms, further education colleges, and other. The other group includes special schools and alternative provision.
76. More students attended non-selective state schools than any other type of school; 48% in 2018. The next largest group were students who attended independent schools; around 20% of geography entrants attended this type of school.



Progression from A Level to University

77. We considered how likely different groups of students were to progress to study geography at university - physical geographical sciences (JACS code: F8) and human and social geography (JACS code: L7). Between 2005 and 2013, more students progressed to F8 degrees than L7, but since 2013 this has reversed.
78. The proportion of students progressing to study geography at university has remained fairly consistent, at around 19-20% of those studying A Level geography.

Progression to geography at degree level

Gender

79. A higher proportion of female students than male students went on to study geography at degree level. Of those students who took geography A Level in 2015, for example, 21% of female students had begun a geography degree by 2018, compared to 17% of male students. The gender gap has remained fairly consistent since 2007.
80. This is rather different if we consider Physical Geography (F8) students and Human and Social Geography (L7) students separately. Female students of A Level geography were consistently more likely to progress to an L7 degree, with a gender gap of between 2-4 percentage points in every year. However, for F8 degrees, the gender gap is generally much smaller and inconsistent in direction. In some years, more male students progressed to this type of degree, and in other years, more female students. However, in every year since 2013, a higher proportion of female students have progressed than male to Physical Geography courses too.

Ethnicity

81. White and mixed students had consistently higher rates of progression than Black and Asian students. Of those who took A Levels in 2015, 19% of white and 17% of mixed students progressed to geography at university by 2018, compared to 14% of Black and 15% of Asian students.
82. Progression rates for students in the 'other' ethnic group varied considerably from year to year. This is because of the relatively low numbers of students in this group who took A Level geography, only 261 in 2017, for example.
83. When broken down by degree type, differences by ethnic group are less clear when looking at progression to L7 degrees, but we see consistently higher progression for white and mixed students to F8 degrees.

Region

84. There was some variation in progression to geography degree by region¹⁷. In every year considered, a higher proportion progressed from London than any other region. In 2015, for example, 22% of A Level geography students from London had progressed to a geography degree by 2018, compared to 19% of students overall. The North West also tended to have a higher progression rate than other regions. Of the remaining regions, none had consistently higher or lower progression rates than others.
85. However, when broken down by degree type a different pattern emerged. While London students were more likely to progress to an L7 degree, they were not more likely to progress to an F8 degree than those from other regions. Students from the North West in contrast tended to be more likely to progress to an F8 degree, but not to an L7 degree.

¹⁷ Region here refers to the Government Office Region in which a student's school or college was located. See the methodology document for more details.

School type

86. Generally, students from independent schools were the most likely to progress to a geography degree, with 21% of those who took A Levels in 2015 having progressed by 2018. Those from selective state schools were next most likely, most years closely followed by those from non-selective state schools and sixth form colleges. Those from FE colleges were least likely; only 17% of those who took A Level, in 2015 progressed.
87. The same pattern was clear when looking at progression to L7 degrees. However, for F8 degrees there were less differences by school type and, if anything, students from independent schools were slightly less likely to progress to this type of degree.

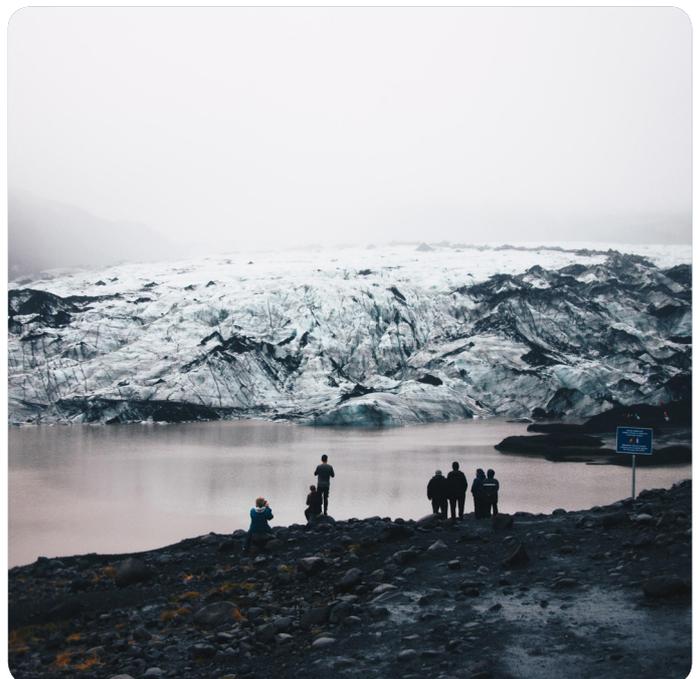
Other A Level subject choice

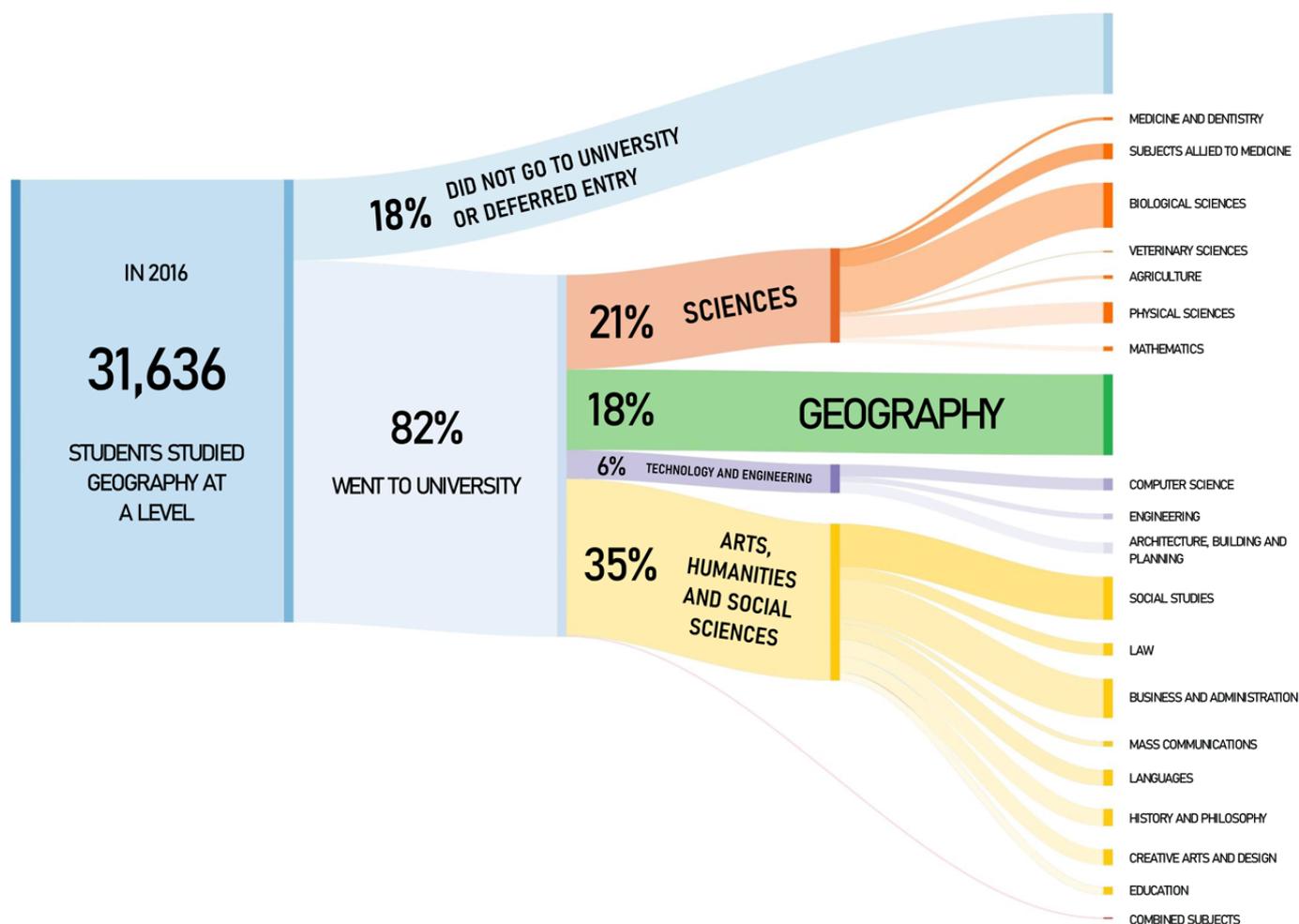
88. Students who took an A Level in business alongside geography were the least likely to progress (of the subjects considered); 13% of those who took geography A Level in 2015 had progressed to a geography degree by 2018, compared to 19% overall. Those who took physical education were also rather less likely to progress (14%), as were those who took chemistry and physics (both 16%). Students who studied economics, history or English were at 22%, 23% and 23% the most likely to progress to study geography at university.
89. As might be expected, there are some differences when we look at the different degree types. Students with an A Level in physics, biology or chemistry were particularly likely to progress to studying an F8 degree, at 12%, 13% and 11% of 2015 geography A Level students, compared to an overall rate of 9%. Those who took business or economics at A Level were less likely to progress (6% and 7%).
90. Looking at L7 degrees, students who studied economics at A Level were most likely to progress (15% of 2015 A Level students), followed by those who studied history or English ((14% and 13%). This compares to an overall rate of 10%. Least likely to progress were those who took science A Levels, particularly physics and chemistry (4% and 5%). Students who took PE and business were also less likely to progress (both 7%).



Progression to other subjects at degree level

91. As noted above, around 19-20% of A Level geography students went on to take a geography degree in the period covered by this report, with around two thirds of A Level geography students went on to study subjects other than geography at degree level.
92. Geography A Level students went on to study a broad range of subjects at university. Biological sciences were the most popular, with 10% of students who took A Level geography in 2015 progressing to a degree in that area by 2018. Social studies (other than human and social geography) were also very popular, with 9% of 2015 geography A Level students progressing to study in this area by 2018, as were business and administrative studies, also with 9% progressing.





Mobility of A Level students to study geography at university

93. A Level geography students who study geography at university are more likely to go to another region than students progressing to other subjects; 74% of those who took geography degrees studied in a different region from where they took A Levels, compared to 70% studying another subject.
94. This was the case for every region except the North West and the North East. Differences were particularly large for the East Midlands (82% of those who went on to a geography degree did so in a different region, compared to 73% of those studying another subject), London (82% compared to 74%) and the West Midlands (78% compared to 72%).
95. The national pattern is not unexpected given the demographic profile of students studying geography (less disadvantaged and less ethnically diverse than average), who overall tend to be more mobile.
96. There were some differences for students from different ethnic backgrounds. For any subject, including geography, students from Asian or Other ethnic backgrounds tended to travel much shorter distances than those from other backgrounds. This is particularly evident for students from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds who tended to travel particularly short distances
97. Looking at the geography of provision (students' distance from a higher education institution (HEI) that offered geography), all students had an HEI (which took >20 students for geography) within 100 km of the school where they took A Levels (median distance was just 14 km). However, just over a thousand A Level geography students had no HEI offering geography within 50 km of their school (East of England - 438 students; the South West - 261 students; and the East Midlands - 217 students).