Widening Participation in the South East Network of Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership (SeNSS DTP)

ARISE: Advancing Resilience and Innovation for Sustainability in Essex

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August 2020

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Description

The research conducted for this report is presented as a follow-up to the Widening Participation in the South East Network of Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership (SeNSS DTP) Report (June 2019). This previous report was the first of its kind to evaluate Widening Participation (WP) in Post-Graduate (PG) studies for a DTP. The present document reports on follow-up actions among SeNSS member institutions and applicant/admission data for the 2020 SeNSS cohort.

1.2 Objectives

The overall aims of this follow-up report by ARISE are to:

- Describe any actions taken by SeNSS, either centrally or by individual member institutions, toward Widening Participation (WP) in Postgraduate (PG) studies since the 2019 report and recommendations;
- Assess whether these actions have manifested in any visible changes in the 2020 SeNSS cohort in terms of participation of various groups;
- Provide recommendations for future analyses and follow-up reports.

In pursuit of these aims, ARISE will:
- Detail reported activities from SeNSS member institutions and the SeNSS core team with respect to agreed activities based on the 2019 Report;
- Analyse new Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) data collected by SeNSS for the 2020 cohort, for both student-led and supervisor-led SeNSS competitions, to determine progression of demographic/intersectional groups through the application stages;
- Compare 2020 data to previous report findings, including both SeNSS and HESA trends, to situate SeNSS 2020 numbers with respect to larger trends.

1.3 Key findings

Based on the information reported and the subsequent analyses, we offer a few observations and recommendations.

1.3.1 Observations: Comparing the 2020 SeNSS Cohort to SeNSS member universities

Based on the comparisons with the 2020 SeNSS cohort, the collection of new EDI data has been revealing. Although we cannot know how previous cohorts compare to the national and SeNSS university 2017-2019 averages, we can say that the 2020 SeNSS cohort has eclipsed the others in the following ways:

1. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of BAME students of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions.

2. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of female students of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions.
3. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of LPN students of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2).
4. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of students whose parents do not have a higher education degree, compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2).
5. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of students with declared disabilities of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2).
6. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of mature students compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as older than 29 years old).
7. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of mature students in both LPN and non-LPN groups, compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (LPN defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2; mature defined as older than 29 years old).
8. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of mature students in both groups of students whose parents have higher education degrees and those who do not, compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (mature defined as older than 29 years old).
9. In the 2020 SeNSS cohort, BAME students were more likely to apply to 1+3 studentships than to +3 studentships, and BAME students had higher award rates for their 1+3 applications than for +3 or +4 applications.

1.3.2 Recommendation: Review twitter campaign strategy and utility

The live twitter sessions generated an average of 3-4 questions per session. One applicant reported learning of the SeNSS competition via twitter. These numbers suggest that the use of twitter may not be the best allocation of SeNSS resources. It is possible that twitter, including hashtags, following, and retweeting, can be a useful resource for reaching new applicants; such an outcome would take substantially targeted efforts. We recommend that twitter be reviewed as a means of outreach, with an eye to either restructuring the usage and strategy, or to replacing twitter with another method that suits the resources and skills available.

1.3.3 Recommendation: Further develop the EDI form to collect more detail.

The new SeNSS forms are much more detailed and offer the ability to interrogate applicant data more deeply vis-à-vis the core team's WP goals. Still, it appears that most students apply based on recommendation from their existing university. Data for cohorts beyond 2020 will reveal whether this balance with online search engines and social media changes over time, so should continue to be tracked to enable assessment of the central SeNSS WP activities.

The mention of Sussex more than twice as often as any other particular university raises the question of whether some university staff members are more actively promoting the SeNSS opportunity than others. We cannot know whether this is the

case, given that 162 applicants chose "university" as their source of information without designating a particular university. Therefore, the EDI form should include more detailed options for students to choose where they learned about SeNSS, including an option for each SeNSS member institution as well as "other university".

1.3.4 Recommendation: Consider reaching out to develop and encourage SeNSS Champions in member institutions via seminars and one-to-one conversations.

More detailed information on the specific universities generating more applications may point to internal university staff members as key champions of the program. If so, SeNSS could potentially boost participation by offering training/information sessions with departments and academic staff within its own member institutions, and within other universities, with relatively low cost. Efforts to widen participation could then be targeted at programs to orient existing key champions, and to educate/orient other possible champions, as well.

1.3.5 Recommendation: Discuss desirable targets for various groups and sub-groups and consider whether a system of contextual offers should be developed.

Now that data enables the comparison of SeNSS numbers to the averages of member institutions and nationally, it is worthwhile to discuss the targets desired by SeNSS (the 2019 ARISE report details several of the options and implications of these decisions). If desirable targets can be agreed for the DTP, it is possible that contextual offers, such as those used in undergraduate admissions, could be employed. Since there is little inter-university agreement about what contextual offers should consist of or be based on, it will be incumbent upon the SeNSS core team to determine what information should factor into the decision, how contextual offers should be allocated, and what a contextual offer would mean.

1.3.6 Recommendation: Further discuss how FluidReview access could be standardised.

The above analysis examines data on the progression of applicants through the stages of the SeNSS admissions process according to ethnicity, gender, secondary school type, and intersectional groups. At the same time, the information provided by SeNSS member institutions reflects wide variation in the rigor with which access is given. Further conversations should take place about the extent to which the existing processes could be brought more into alignment across institutions. Those member institutions who do not wish to implement a change should specify what sort of data/information they would need to be convinced of the gatekeeping potential, so that a proper research design could be developed to investigate the issue, with clear actions to follow once results were delivered.

1.3.7 Recommendation: Continue to ring-fence 1+3 studentships as a WP strategy.

Though one year of data is not enough to establish definite conclusions, the 2020 data indicates that BAME students are more likely to apply to, and be successful in receiving, 1+3 awards than any other type. We therefore tentatively conclude that ring-fencing a certain number of 1+3 studentships will attract more BAME applicants, and recommend continuing this ring-fencing and analysing further data accordingly.

2   Background

2.1   About Us

2.1.1   SeNSS-DTP

The South East Network of Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership (SeNSS-DTP) has received additional funding from the ESRC to work collaboratively with the Universities of Essex, Sussex, and East Anglia to enhance business engagement in the social sciences. As key partners in the SeNSS-DTP, these three universities have substantial experience in co-developing social science ambitions, drawing upon the existing work undertaken through Impact Accelerator Accounts. This new partnership will draw on the robust governance structures of the SeNSS-DTP to ensure the benefits of the activities extend across all three partners, and beyond, into the wider DTP locations (SeNSS, 2018).

SeNSS consortium members are:
- City, University of London
- University of East Anglia
- University of Essex
- Goldsmiths, University of London
- University of Kent
- University of Reading
- University of Roehampton, London
- Royal Holloway, University of London
- University of Surrey
- University of Sussex

2.1.2   ARISE

Founded by Dr. Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, the ARISE Initiative (Advancing Resilience and Innovation for a Sustainable Environment) is dedicated to conducting rigorous, evidence-based evaluations of social programs and resilience-building projects around the world. ARISE studies policy documents, program impact, and project delivery to advise how organisations can best allocate scarce resources to achieve their priorities. ARISE has developed the *Spotlight Toolkit* and the Resilience Database to help researchers and public agencies design evaluations and measure resilience. ARISE comprises an interdisciplinary team of experts in public policy, political economy, public administration evaluation, quantitative research methods, criminology, geography, environmental studies, computerised text mining and data compliance. Ultimately, we hope to facilitate the informed prioritisation of resources, policies and initiatives, and to foster transparency and accountability in public service provision.

2.2   Scope and Methodology

The research conducted for this project is presented as a follow-up to the Widening Participation in the South East Network of Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership (SeNSS DTP) Report (June 2019). This previous report was the first of its kind to evaluate Widening Participation (WP) in Post-Graduate (PG) studies for a DTP. The present document

reports on follow-up actions among SeNSS member institutions and applicant/admission data for the 2020 SeNSS cohort.

2.2.1   Literature and Documentation

The documents collected include information reported by SeNSS member institutions regarding their own strategies for WP in PG studies, as well as information collected from the SeNSS core team. We augment this with information regarding the use of contextual information and data in admissions processes, according to guidance published by UCAS (the University and Colleges Admissions Service).

2.2.2   Data on Student Characteristics

The SeNSS core team supplied data on students in the SeNSS program. This data existed for three cohorts (2017, 2018, 2019), and was updated for this report with data for the 2020 cohort. ARISE compared the 2020 SeNSS data to previous cohorts, as well as to trends among SeNSS member institutions and non-SeNSS institutions, as indicated in the previous report. The 2020 data was collected by SeNSS via its revised Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion data collection form. This form was updated as a follow-on action to the 2019 report, and includes more inclusive questions and therefore more detailed EDI information.

The 2017-2019 HESA data covered multiple student characteristics for students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The data did not include information about all characteristics identified as WP indicators, nor did it offer the same information for UG and PG students. This data was purchased under an information sharing agreement with HESA, and as such, was destroyed on a particular date after the project was delivered. The aggregate findings of the HESA data are therefore used here for comparison.

2.3   Decisions, actions and activities following the 2019 Report

Here we detail access to the SeNSS program via the online application process. The information presented in this section was reported by the SeNSS central office[1], and augmented with data collected from applicants via the 2020 EDI forms (see 3.1.1 for details on EDI data collected for each SeNSS cohort).

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[1] Information in this section was provided by the following sources/documents:
Emails and discussions with Felicity Szesnat and Pam Cox, June-August 2020; ANNEX 3: SeNSS WIDENING PARTICIPATION GROUP: PROPOSED WIDENING PARTICIPATION STRATEGY, 2019-20; Old website wording document; Equal Opportunity Form (2019-20 compeitition); SeNSS_2020-21_studentship_application_guidance_updated_17Jan20 (1); SeNSS 2019-20 studentship application guidance January 2019; Equal Opportunities form September19 (1); Making SeNSE of SeNSS – 1-6; 2020-21 Jobs Draft Advert - Collaborative Competition with research proposals; 2020-21 Jobs Draft Advert - Collaborative Competition FS 25Sept19; 2019-20 Draft Advert - Collaborative Competition with research proposals; 2020-21 FindaPhD Mini-site 20Sept19 v2; 2020-21 Jobs Draft Advert - Student-led Competition FS 25Sept19; 2019-20 Draft Advert - Student-led Competition v3; SeNSS Management Board meeting minutes 11.09.19 - WP strategy.

3 Efforts since 2019 Report

3.1 Central SeNSS efforts to Widen Participation (WP)

As noted in the 2019 report, we define *Widening Participation* (WP) to be a goal in Higher Education (HE) to address differences in access and progress between students from different social groups. Based on the 2019 Report, the SeNSS core team proposed a Widening Participation strategy to the WP Group, which was comprised of Pam Cox (chair and SeNSS Director), Helena Gillespie (Joint Head of Academic Director of Widening Participation at UEA), Vivien Easson (Head of Postgraduate Research Service at UEA), Joanna John (Doctoral Skills Training and Development at Reading), Shane Dowle (Manager, Doctoral College at Surrey), Gina Yannitell Reinhardt (advisor to the group for the duration of the IAA DTP BB award), Paul Newman (SeNSS Co-ordinator), and Felicity Szesnat (SeNSS Manger). The strategic aims, along with proposed interventions and actions, as well as measures and evidence suggested, are presented in Table 1. The final column reports on whether ARISE was able to confirm that the efforts have been undertaken, and cites the evidence of such.

Table 1 WP strategy proposed by SeNSS core team following 2019 ARISE Report

Interventions and Actions	Measures and Evidence planned in strategy	Confirmed by ARISE? Evidence?
Strategic Aim I: To encourage SeNSS members to develop their own PG WP strategies		
Invite SeNSS HEIs to respond to ARISE report	Core team receive responses from 10 SeNSS HEIs by 31 Oct 2019	Yes. Meeting minutes and attendance.
Invite SeNSS HEIs to consider how the ARISE report links with their broader equality, diversity, inclusion and access work eg Athena Swan; Race Equality Charter; UG Access and Participation Plans, including UG strategies for access, success, retention and progression	SeNSS HEIs internal reporting with the option of sharing good practice with SeNSS	Yes. Meeting minutes; Annex 3b: Institutional approaches to granting access to FluidReview
SeNSS HEIs to monitor their own PG WP trends using their own HESA data returns	SeNSS HEIs internal reporting	Cannot confirm, as most HEIs report focusing on COVID-19 pandemic and unable to focus on EDI/HESA internal reporting; noted in email responses from HEIs and in SeNSS WP Strategy 03 June 2020 – PC – progress "Progress against milestones".
Strategic Aim II: To broaden the SeNSS applicant pool		
SeNSS information evening held in October each year in central London with a particular outreach focus on our under-represented groups	Convert 20% attendees to applicants	Event held. - A face-to-face event at City University was held to discuss SeNSS with prospective applicants, advise on the application process,

		and advise how to identify and approach a PhD supervisor; - City University was chosen for its central, easy-to-reach location; - The date was set for a Friday at lunchtime to try to be available for working candidates; - The event was advertised across all ten SeNSS member institutions; - Member institutions circulated announcement, targeting WP candidates; - SeNSS offered to reimburse travel costs for attendees - Unconfirmed whether a particular percentage of attendees was converted to applicants
SeNSS HEIs to create or expand events for potential studentship applicants in October each year	SeNSS HEIs internal reporting	Yes. Reports from 3 member institutions (Section 3.3).
Ring-fence 9 student-led 1+3 awards per year for 'First Masters' applicants (MB, SB, CT)	Monitor impact on applications and awards (WPG)	Yes. Twelve studentships were ring-fenced for those applicants applying for a 1+3 structure and/or without one or more Masters degrees
SeNSS agrees partnership with the Brilliant Club – an organisation linking doctoral researchers from leading HEIs with state schools	Increase in SeNSS students' participation in Brilliant Club activities Brilliant Club annual reports	Yes. Partnership agreed; noted in SeNSS WP Strategy 03 June 2020 – PC – progress "Progress against milestones".
SeNSS to review/amend language of competition guidance to enhance its accessibility	Revised competition guidance	Yes. The 2020 competition guidance is more visually appealing, easier to understand, and easier to follow (fewer words used; links embedded rather than full URLs printed). The text was not substantially revised, but already did list as the first item that Masters degrees are not required to apply.
SeNSS to highlight ESRC's view that applicants do not require a first class degree	Revised competition guidance	Yes. New competition guidance notes that applicants do not require a first from a Russell Group university to apply
SeNSS' marketing material, films and case studies to reflect and promote the diversity of our student and supervisory community	Regularly review all SeNSS promotional material	Yes. The central SeNSS website wording and images were changed to reflect greater inclusivity and diversity, and to be more welcoming. Three one-hour live twitter sessions were held so prospective applicants could post questions anonymously; - Questions primarily indicated participants were trying to return to education

		- Sessions held at lunchtime on Tuesdays and Thursdays in October 2019, two weeks after Fluidreview went live for applications - 10-11 questions came in over the 3 sessions Advertisements for the SeNSS programs were run on jobs.ac.uk and findaphd.com (the same sites as before), with different, more inclusive wording; - Also purchased a mini-site, so changed the nature of the advertising to enable more information, including basic and more specific, to be shared; A Twitter campaign ran from August to September 2019 entitled "Making SeNSE of SeNSS", trying to demystify SeNSS; - The campaign led up to the launch of the competitions and thereafter, and culminated in launch of competitions on 1 October Emails and posters were sent to each SeNSS member institutions
Strategic Aim III: To enhance the fairness of SeNSS selection processes		
Apply WP benchmarks for SeNSS Improve proportional participation relative to the national averages for SeNSS-related PGR studies. Request that ESRC/UKRI monitor DTPs against other benchmarks identified in the ARISE report, including: 1. the DTP UG community 2. the geographical locations of DTPs 3. the UK population as a whole.	Annual monitoring of applications and awards across and between pathways (WPG). Monitor developments across the ESRC DTP network via the DTP Directors' group and ESRC PG training team.	Yes. Benchmarks based on 2019 ARISE report and referenced below (4.2.1) to assess SeNSS' position vis-à-vis these benchmarks.
All SeNSS selectors to complete their standard HEI equality and diversity training and to complete unconscious bias training where this is provided by their HEI as standard. SeNSS to explore providing where it is not standard.	SeNSS ALs to report to CT	Unable to confirm; still outstanding to determine, as noted in SeNSS WP Strategy 03 June 2020 – PC – progress "Progress against milestones".
Compare SeNSS' equal opportunities monitoring (EOI) form with other RC DTPs	Monitor developments across the ESRC DTP network via the DTP	Yes. Revised and reported by SeNSS Director to DTP Directors' Group

	Directors' group and ESRC PG training team.	
Review and amend SeNSS' EOI form in line with ARISE and WPG recommendations (CT) Example: - add Two Ticks disability - add socio-economic measures (including POLAR neighbourhood measures by capturing postcode at time of UG application and at time of SeNSS application)	Revised form	Yes. New form (see 3.1.1) gives the opportunity to include: - DSA benefits - Postcode - New gender identity - Parental figures not immediately referred to as parents - Disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act - Family structure - Where the applicant learned about the SeNSS competition
Strategic Aim IV: To enhance inclusivity of SeNSS community		
Review composition of speakers and panels at SeNSS-funded events (CT)	More diverse speakers and panels	Still to be addressed, noted in SeNSS WP Strategy 03 June 2020 – PC – progress "Progress against milestones".
Disseminate and discuss ARISE findings and SeNSS WP strategy at SeNSS events, eg Summer Conference.	Agenda/conference notes.	Planned for 2020 conference but reduced coverage due to virtual format; noted in SeNSS WP Strategy 03 June 2020 – PC – progress "Progress against milestones".
Maintain SeNSS Widening Participation Group and review its remit and membership	Follow-on meetings and communications.	Yes. Follow-on report commissioned.
Strategic Aim V: To promote better PG WP practice across RC DTPs and PGT/PGR education		
Ask ESRC to define possible WP benchmarks for DTP network	Agenda and meeting notes.	Yes. ESRC has taken up discussion with DTN Directors. Asked via emails and conversations, discussed in ESRC DTN Directors Meeting Sessions (September 2020)
Ask ESRC to share DTP EO data with DTP network	Agenda and meeting notes.	Yes. Asked via emails and conversations.
Share insights from ARISE report and our WP strategy with RC DTP network and wider HE sector	Agenda and meeting notes.	Yes. Shared by Pam Cox and ARISE via DTP Director meetings, Westminster Forum workshops, press releases.

3.1.1   Revised Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion information

The SeNSS core team shared anonymous data about their student application process for the 2020 cohort. Descriptions of this 2020 data are now given alongside the previously analysed data from the 2017, 2018 and 2019 cohorts.

Table 2 shows the variables available for each cohort group. There are five stages to the admission process in the SeNSS doctoral program: application; institutional review; pathway review; management board review; award. It should be noted that for the 2017 cohort there is no data for the first two stages of the application process.

Table 2 Data provided by SeNSS about admission process

	Year (cohort)			
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pathway	yes	yes	yes	yes
University	yes	yes	yes	yes
Gender (assigned at birth)	no	no	no	yes
Gender (current)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Age	yes	yes	yes	yes
Marital status (or civil partnership)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Disability	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ethnicity	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sexual orientation	yes	yes	yes	yes
Religion	no	yes	yes	yes
Disability	no	no	no	yes
DSA	no	no	no	yes
Caring responsibilities	no	yes	yes	yes
Family Structure	no	no	no	yes
History in Care	no	no	no	yes
Parental university	no	yes	yes	yes
School type	no	yes	yes	yes
Learn about SeNSS	no	no	no	yes
Study mode	no	no	yes	yes
Stage in the admission process	3 to 5 and declined	1 to 5	1 to 5 and declined	1 to 5 and declined

The original data provided by SeNSS covers many of the WP dimensions previously discussed, and the 2020 data includes several additional categories useful for evaluating WP. Of note, the 2020 data includes postcodes, which enables POLAR identification (Table 3). While previously Parental university or School type were indirect measures of socio-economic status, POLAR neighbourhood classifications are a more traditionally accepted measure. In this case, applicants were asked for the postcode of the home from which they applied for UG studies. In the following tables we describe each year according to each WP variable of interest.

Table 3 Summary statistics of SeNSS data: compared by year

Gender	2017	2018	2019	2020 Gender assigned at birth	2020 Gender identification now
Female	64	162	174	147	144
Male	44	75	78	99	97
Non-Binary	0	5	2	5	2
Gender variant					2
Trans man					1
Other	1	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to say	7	2	3	0	5
Total	116	244	257	251	251

Age	2017	2018	2019	2020
0-24 years old	28	74	64	70

25-29 years old	39	66	96	79
30-34 years old	20	35	40	44
35-39 years old	11	30	12	14
40-44 years old	6	9	12	15
45-49 years old	3	11	19	12
50-54 years old	1	10	6	8
55-59 years old	0	4	2	4
Prefer not to say	8	5	6	5
Total	116	244	257	251

Pathway	2017	2018	2019
Business and Management	10	24	25
Development Studies	11	16	18
Economics	17	23	26
Education	7	22	21
Human Geography	7	14	14
Linguistics	0	10	16
Politics and International Relations	13	22	20
Psychology	14	32	33
Science, Technology and Sustainability Studies	6	12	14
Social Anthropology	12	18	17
Social Work & Social Policy	1	13	11
Socio-Legal Studies	11	19	22
Sociology	7	19	20
Total	116	244	257

University	2017	2018	2019	2020
City, University of London	2	6	8	10
Goldsmiths, University of London	9	18	16	11
Royal Holloway, University of London	11	22	26	21
University of East Anglia	17	38	41	34
University of Essex	12	25	33	47
University of Kent	9	41	43	19
University of Reading	14	30	22	24
University of Roehampton	3	6	7	5
University of Surrey	10	6	5	8
University of Sussex	27	52	56	78
Total	114	244	257	257

Married or in a civil partnership?	2017	2018	2019	2020
No	86	177	214	187
Prefer not to say	7	15	5	9
Yes	23	51	38	55
Total	116	243	257	251

Disability	2017	2018	2019	2020
No	99	208	220	214
Prefer not to say	11	6	6	8
Yes	6	30	31	29
Total	116	244	257	251

Ethnicity	2017	2018	2019	2020
Asian British	2	3	7	13
Asian Other	3	8	5	9
Black British	0	1	11	5
Black Other	1	4	0	14

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Mixed/multiple ethnicity	4	7	13	13
Prefer not to say	14	8	4	8
Other	0	5	6	6
White British	46	158	133	123
White Other	46	50	78	60
Total	116	244	257	251

Sexual Orientation	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
Asexual	0	1	0	22
Bisexual	9	13	16	5
Gay man	3	1	8	4
Gay woman/lesbian	3	4	6	192
Heterosexual	73	191	197	3
Pansexual	1	3	1	19
Prefer not to say	26	31	29	2
Queer	1	0	0	4
Total	116	244	257	251

Religion	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
Agnostic				32
Atheist		1	3	45
Buddhist		1	1	1
Christian (all denominations)		63	61	53
Hindu		3	0	5
Humanist		0	1	
Jewish or of Jewish origin		0	2	3
Muslim		7	11	12
None		127	144	78
Prefer not to say		1	0	17
Other		35	31	5
Total		238	254	251

Caring responsibilities	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
No		219	240	230
Prefer not to say		8	5	6
Yes		17	12	14
Total		244	257	250

Did either of your parents attend HE?	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
I don't know		3	5	
No		111	118	
Prefer not to say		4	3	
Yes		126	131	
College or technical college				53
Primary school				9
Secondary school				53
University undergraduate degree				77
University masters degree				29
University doctoral degree				29
Total		244	257	250

The following tables summarise data that was collected after the re-designed questions were implemented, beginning in 2020.

Studentship applied for	Total
+3 studentship (available across all Pathways)	170
+4 studentship (available in the Business and Management Studies, Economics, Education, Human Geography, Politics and International Relations, some sub-Pathways within Science, Technology, and Sustainability Studies, Socio-Legal Studies, and Sociology Pathways)	5
1+3 studentship (available across all Pathways)	84
Total	259

Family Structure	Total
I was raised by a one-parent family	28
I was raised by a two-parent family	180
I was raised by two parents, who lived separately, not together	26
Prefer not to say	9
From the age of 11, I was raised in a one-parent family. Father living in U.S.A.	1
I was not raised by my parents, but by my grandmother.	1
I was raised between multiple family members depending upon my immediate family circumstances.	1
I was raised in a two-parent family for part of my childhood, but my parents then separated.	1
Technically two-parent, but may as well have only been one.	1
Two-parent until 2010, then one-parent	1
Raised by my mother and step father	1
Raised by two adoptive parents	1
Total	251

How are you related to your two-parent family or single parent?	Total
Biological child	232
Biological mother + step-father	1
I was raised by one biological parent and one step-parent	1
Total	234

Were you ever taken into care, even for a short while?	Total
No	240
Prefer not to say	6
Yes	5
Total	251

POLAR classifications based on postcode	Total
POLAR-1	18
POLAR-2	20
POLAR-3	20
POLAR-4	35
POLAR-5	46
Could not remember postcode	23
Did not study for undergraduate degree in the UK	65
Unidentifiable postcode given	12
Prefer not to say	10
Total	250

Where did you hear about the SeNSS competition?	Total
FindaPhD.com website	8
From someone at your university	162
Jobs.ac.uk website	9
Prefer not to say	3
Promotional items	4
Recruitment fairs	1
SeNSS website	17
Search engine	8
Advised my prospective Supervisor (Dr. Julie Litchfield)	1
Advised to apply by Prof Mckay	1
An Email from University of Sussex employee	1
Former lecturer	1
Friend	1
From Masters supervisor	1
From Sussex Lecturers	1
From my supervisors after finding them via the University of Kent website	1
I emailed a previous lecturer asking for advice on PhD funding and he mentioned it	1
I was asked to apply by Sussex	1
My department	1
My provisional PhD supervisor at University of Sussex	1
My supervisor	1
Potential PhD Academic Supervisor	1
Potential Supervisors	1
Potential supervisor	1
Professors	1
Social media	1
Sussex University website	2
Sussex Website	1
Sussex open evening	1
Sussex university website	1
Through my supervisor	1
Through the University of Sussex	1
Twitter	1
UEA Website	1
University of Essex Scholarship Search	1
University of Essex website	2
University of Reading website	1
University of Sussex PhD website	1
University of Sussex website	1
University website	1
Work supervisor	1
Also recommended by supervisor	1
Re-applying	1
Recommendation from lecturer	1
Total	250

Stata code to clean and merge data for each year has been written and will now be stored with the SeNSS core for future use.

3.2 Efforts Surrounding FluidReview

The SeNSS studentship typically opens on 1 October of one year for applications to begin study in October of the following year. FluidReview is the online application used to collect applications. Applicants must first apply for a post-graduate place at their chosen institution. Once they've started that process, including identifying a supervisor to work with, then they can ask for a FluidReview code to allow them to start their SeNSS application.

SeNSS provides the following guidance regarding who should be given the FluidReview access code:
   a) the applicant must qualify under the ESRC's residential requirements;
   b) to apply for a Masters plus PhD, applicants will need: qualifications or professional experience equivalent to a first or upper second class honours degree[2]; and
   c) to apply for a PhD only, applicants will need: qualifications or professional experience equivalent to a Masters degree with distinction or merit, that includes relevant research methods training[3].

All SeNSS member institutions then review applications for the SeNSS fellowship from their university and undertakes a sifting process of their own. Each member institution has the opportunity to nominate a certain number of candidates for an award. Each member institution offers degrees as part of certain SeNSS pathways, and can nominate up to 3 candidates for each pathway of which it is a member.

Each institution conducts its internal review process differently. Some allow all of those who have been accepted for a PhD to apply for SeNSS funding as long as their proposed supervisor supports the effort. Others only allow those with exemplary academic records to apply. Some do not let anyone apply to SeNSS until they have held competitions locally and identified three applicants to nominate for each eligible Pathway. Only those select applicants are allowed to create applications in FluidReview.

The variance in practice can give rise to a number of obstacles, many of which may deter applications from groups relevant to widening participation. Table 4 describes the practices of each member institution in turn[4].

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[2] Taken directly from ESRC guidance.
[3] Taken directly from ESRC guidance.
[4] Annex 3b: Institutional approaches to granting access to FluidReview. 2020. SeNSS Widening Participation Group meeting (14 July 2020).

Table 4 SeNSS member institutions' approaches to granting access to FluidReview

SeNSS HEI	Approach to granting access to FluidReview
City	City practice last year was for applicants to apply to the respective department through normal University processes. Department than [*sic.*] looks at all eligible candidates and chooses the best four candidates. Eligibility is defined as eligible in the ESRC sense. This step only filters out students who do not hit the residence criteria. In Economics, applicants were vetted as they applied to City and if accepted for study at City were given FluidReview access. After the institutional deadline all FluidReview applications were assessed, ranked and the best 3-4 submitted to the next stage. In Sociology, applicants were only vetted after the institutional deadline, ranked and the best 3-4 given access to FluidReview to make their applications. I am seeking to change this practice as it turns into a veritable yet fully predictable disaster (I had that two times in two now). I like the Economics approach and I do not think it is that indefensible. City has its own electronic application system. So applicants need to make an application to City. SeNSS guidance also says that applicants have to be accepted at the institution before making a SeNSS application.
UEA	Re FluidReview, I believe our practice is to get PGR Directors in each School to indicate to interested and promising candidates that they should start a FluidReview applications following their acceptance on the PhD programme. Applications are reviewed and improved, supervisors surveyed and following a process of shortlisting by a panel (PGR Director/Pathway lead, Research Director, PGR Admissions Officer, usually) the top three/four get feedback on the application and submit the final version. Different pathways at UEA take different approaches to fluidreview access. Some grant access to the three nominated applicants (based on the UEA PhD application); some allow wider access at an earlier stage (before the PhD application is submitted).
Essex	Our current practice for giving applicants access to FluidReview is for the code to be given to them directly by the academic department. We do not publicise the access code; we give the access code to the GAs and GDs and ask them to share with colleagues in the department as appropriate. This is to act as a gatekeeper, so that only those applicants who are supported by the department are able to submit an application. The idea is to prevent ineligible or inappropriate applications making it to FluidReview. I can see [the] point about this institutional gatekeeper role preventing us from being able to see the full applicant picture and that there could be potential for WP efforts to be scuppered at that initial stage. However, I would also argue that institutions should be applying the criteria for admission etc and, therefore, providing the criteria enables WP efforts this shouldn't be the stage at which we have hurdles. That said, [it] does concern me that it isn't working in that way.
Goldsmiths	At Goldsmiths we incorporate the "are you applying for ESRC funding etc" question routinely in the online application process for all the PhD programmes that are eligible and then the candidates who say yes complete a more detailed application (not via fluid review) that gives all the SeNSS relevant info. The best in each pathway are then established within the departments in that pathway and then we give the fluid review access to the nominees plus one or two reserves.

Kent	All eligible students who apply for a PhD at Kent by the SeNSS deadline (this is usually around 10th January) are considered for SeNSS funding. After the deadline, schools undertake a selection process, where applicants are shortlisted and interviewed. Following this selection process, the chosen 3 students per pathway are invited to complete an application on Fluidreview. The Fluidreview applications are then submitted to the Pathway stage of the competition.
Reading	In the current round, we completed shortlisting outside FR and then permitted only those three per pathway shortlisted to progress into. The round before [was] fully open and unfiltered, but it did create a lot more admin time and discussion ard made it very clear that no-one else was doing that and they were all strongly filtering.
Roehampton	We usually give access to fluid review to anyone who has had positive contact with the department and has been asked to make an application. We ask that they then make the Roehampton and SeNSS application.
Royal Holloway	The method we used this academic year for the student-led competition was: 1. Applicants should contact the Pathway Lead in the first instance to discuss their research proposal and potential supervisors, by 14 January. 2. If advised to by the Pathway Lead the applicant should formally apply online via the Royal Holloway portal, by 20 January. 3. Following internal Pathway reviews those applicants whom they wish to proceed in the competition are provided the link and access code to FluidReview, with a deadline for completion of their application by 3 February. 4. The Royal Holloway part of the process on FluidReview was completed by the SeNSS deadline of 17 February.
Surrey	In the past we have advised applicants (in the studentship advert) to email the local PGR Director and SeNSS lead and inform them that they are interested in applying for a SeNSS studentship. At this point the SeNSS lead discusses their interests/basic eligibility, they then give the applicant the SeNSS code. Sometimes the SeNSS lead points the candidate to another person to advise.
Sussex	The admin lead is listed as the contact and distributes the FluidReview login. We get contacted by pathways wanting us to give out the login and by students asking to be given access to the application form. We advise anyone wanting to apply to apply to Sussex in the first instance and make the pathway lead aware of their application. We then only give them the login if the pathway lead gives us the go ahead. They generally do - just in one of two cases where OS students were trying to claim they were economists to make themselves eligible were they turned down. The process is quite devolved at the moment with the PILS running the process for their pathway. Some pathways seem to do most of their screening from the Sussex application and then get their top few to complete FR. I would say that over half the enquiries are from ineligible OS applicants – so we will always need some pre-screening.

It should be noted that suggestions to alter or standardise FluidReview access across member institutions was not met with uniform agreement. The most common objection was that changing FluidReview access would be unlikely to change outcomes in a way meaningful enough to make the change worthwhile. Despite the objections, the lack of standardisation in FluidReview represents an opportunity for varied subjective judgements to be inserted into the admissions process. Analysis of applicant demographics according to stage (see 4.2, below) does point to the pathway review as being a key juncture where awardee profiles begin to differ from applicant profiles.

3.3 Activities undertaken by SeNSS Member Institutions

Each member university was requested to report on the activities it has undertaken since the 2019 were agreed. The request came as the HE sector was contending with substantial disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Four SeNSS member institutions were able to report.

3.3.1 University of East Anglia

The University of East Anglia (UEA) supplied three documents to ARISE[5]. These documents detail University-level efforts made toward equality, diversity, and inclusion generally, as well as toward greater understanding of the BAME PG experience more specifically.

3.3.1.1 UEA General efforts

In 2019, UEA achieved Athena SWAN Silver status and was ranked 202nd out of 503 submissions to the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme. UEA is preparing for submission to the Race Equality Charter in 2022. The BAME Staff Network meets bimonthly and will be given the opportunity to inform the work toward submission.

3.3.1.2 The BAME PG Experience at UEA

On 10 October 2019, Dr. Vivien Easson, Head of Postgraduate Research Service for the University, issued a statement of intent of the Doctoral College Executive to contribute to improving equality and diversity by focusing on the experience of postgraduate researchers from ethnic minorities (BAME). The statement noted the activities already underway at UEA, including the Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Network[6], Black History Month activities[7], and the UEA Students' Union review (see Appendix D, B6_PGR19D014D), noting work on: how the SU could better provide activities, opportunities and services and create a sense of belonging for their BAME members (e.g. addition of new officer roles in this area); lobbying around academic issues around acknowledgement of legacies of colonialism and racism and representation in this space both in staff and curriculum content; and launching the Decolonise UEA Campaign and a linked campaign called Eradicate Hate around raising awareness of how racism is experienced and encouraging students to report.

The statement further called for analysis on admissions that separates ethnicity by Home, EU and international fee status and examines funding, as well as an analysis of lifecycle information (Courage engagement, Submission rates, PRES) by ethnicity. It suggested a timeline agreed with the Students' Union, as well as the composition of a BAME PGR Experience Working Group that would ensure representation by the Students' Union, the Academic Director of the UEA Doctoral College, and academic/PGR representatives from various Faculties and groups. The Working Group met on 30 April 2020 to revise its timeline, review people's experiences during COVID-19, discuss the role of the University, and propose areas to address over the ensuing 12 months.

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[5] Easson, Vivien. 2019. Terms of Reference for Review of BAME PGR experience (7 October 2019); Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Office. 2019. Annual Report; Review of BAME PGR Experience Working Group. 2020. Agenda (30 April 2020).
[6] lred.uea.ac.uk/web/hub/equality/networks/bme-staff-network
[7] https://www.uea.su/campaigns/liberation/blackhistorymonth/

3.3.2 Royal Holloway

Royal Holloway reported that despite the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting hopes for accomplishing more WP work, the University did achieve the Race Equality Charter Bronze award. Just prior to lockdown, ran a supervisor workshop on supporting BAME students with Rochelle Rowe-Wiseman from UCL, who was chairing the UKCGE working group on BAME postgraduate matters. Additionally, the University was planning to offer peer mentoring for all interested PGRs, beginning in Autumn 2020.

3.3.3 University of Roehampton

Roehampton University shared with us its new Access and Participation Plan (2020-21 to 2024-25). This plan presents an impressively comprehensive strategy to widen access, continuation, attainment, and progression of students at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with special attention to the following target groups: mature students; students from low participation neighbourhood (LPN); care leavers; deprived students; black students; and Asian students. Concrete targets include reducing and eliminating gaps in each stage of the student lifecycle among these groups, and between these groups and those in other groups.

Roehampton has committed to the following plans to reach its targets:

- *National Collaborative Outreach Programme* (NCOP): Roehampton is part of the Aimhigher London NCOP, through which it provides collaborative interventions for Years 9-13 students from low participation wards.
- *Cool to be Curious* is a collaborative outreach project run in partnership with Putney High School that aims to raise aspirations of children from 6 London Borough of Wandsworth primary schools, raise confidence with mentoring from Year 11 pupils, raise attainment through the desire to succeed, and give their parents confidence that university is a realistic option for their children.
- *Game Plan*: a four-day Summer School for boys in year 10 from disadvantaged backgrounds, focused on raising confidence and awareness of the higher education opportunities available.
- *Pathways to Law*: a collaborative outreach programme delivered in partnership with the Sutton Trust and other HEIs, aiming to inspire and support academically-able students from disadvantaged backgrounds interested in a career in law.
- *Learning Together National Network*: the Department of Social Sciences offers an accredited higher education course to prisoners at HMP Belmarsh.
- *Roehampton Taster lecturer programme*: postgraduate students develop age-appropriate mini lectures and deliver these to encourage extra- curricular learning and inspire aspiration outside the standard school subject portfolio.

Roehampton has identified geographic areas outside of London to target with further recruitment and outreach activity, with the aim of increasing access from these regions.

To provide opportunities for mature students Roehampton annually visits a significant number of colleges with a high percentage of mature students and partners with a further education college to deliver programmes designed for, and targeted at, mature learners.

The university has prioritised plans to develop more flexible patterns of learning for mature students, including the development of degree apprenticeships and accelerated degrees to build a greater sense of belonging to the university community. Specific elements of the university's curriculum development and design are aimed at increasing the numbers of mature students, including the development of more vocational/accessible courses, and the addition of more flexibility in the form of blended learning.

Roehampton has designated the Access and Participation Monitoring Group as responsible for monitoring and evaluating its progress toward its APP aims, objectives and targets. Staff and student representatives will also be involved in assessing the ongoing evaluation and designing new actions or adjustments.

3.3.4   University of Sussex

The University of Sussex joined the Race Equality Charter in December 2018 and is working towards an application under the Charter by February 2022, overseen by the Self-Assessment Team (SAT) and chaired by the Provost. The University has appointed a part-time Equality Charter Manager within the EDI Unit who will support the work of the Self-Assessment Team.

The Students' Union has designated BAME ambassadors for each of six participating schools, as well as specifically for foundation year students, to act as conduits for communicating the BAME student experience to University senior managers[8].

Sussex is home to a researcher-led initiative to raise the visibility of BAME PhD students in the Life Sciences. A biochemistry student and BAME ambassador, Kamilia Kasbi, leads this initiative[9].

Sussex has also developed a Junior Research Associate (JRA)[10] scheme, which consists of an 8-week summer training program for high-performing undergraduates. Participants receive a bursary and participate in training workshops. The JRA offers undergraduates research experience and supervision, including an ultimate poster presentation, and has specially ring-fenced funding for First Generation Scholars.

3.4   Contextual offers

We note that one possible strategy for achieving widened participation in undergraduate studies could be through the use of contextual offers[11]. With this practice, applicants are flagged in a university's admissions systems as being eligible for consideration of an offer based on contextual information gathered at an outreach event, or by certain triggers prompted by information reported in their UCAS form (the University and Colleges Admissions Service application form). The information particularly noted is the applicant's

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[8] http://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/51922
[9] http://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/52195
[10] https://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/undergraduate-research/junior-research-associates
[11] https://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/adviser-news/news/contextualised-admissions-how-it-works-practice

educational, geo-demographic and socio-economic background status, including historical data about an applicant's school or college, the applicant's school code, post code, and time spent in care. The actual triggers for a contextual offer differ from one university to another and are not standardized.

The meaning of a contextual offer differs from university to university as well. Once an applicant is flagged as a potential candidate for a contextual offer, that applicant could be given a contextual offer if admitted. This offer might be lower than non-contextual offers, such as a lower grade threshold for admittance. The information might also be used to determine decisions regarding financial support or additional academic/student support if admitted. The information is often used to target students for widening participation.

4   Data Analysis

4.1   SeNSS accessibility

As noted in 3, several actions were undertaken centrally to more fully advertise the SeNSS opportunity, with an aim of widening participation in the SeNSS application process. Though we cannot draw conclusions about the extent to which any one of these activities was successful, we can examine the main ways in which applicants hear about the SeNSS opportunity.

The revised EDI form asks, "Where did you hear about the SeNSS competition?" Of the 250 applicants who answered the question:

- Nearly all (196) report learning about the opportunity from their own university, with:
    - 21 reporting learning from their department or a supervisor, advisor, or professor/lecturer, and
    - 13 reporting particular university websites or recruitment (1 from UEA, 1 from Reading, 3 from Essex, and 8 from Sussex).
- Thirty-two heard through SeNSS social media, promotional materials, websites, and events;
- Twenty-six learned through search engines such as FindaPhD.com and jobs.ac.uk.

This data suggests that the most likely means to attract applicants in 2020 was via personal interactions with existing university students. ARISE does not have access to data to assess whether those students were from SeNSS member institutions or elsewhere, but we can recommend that this pattern be tracked so further strategies of widening participation can be developed. We offer more detail on this idea below.

4.2 SeNSS admission process

There are five stages to the admission process in the SeNSS doctoral program: application; institutional review; pathway review; management board review; award. From approximately 300 applications each year, typically less than 50 students are awarded a scholarship. Although there is no information for the first two stages in 2017, Figure 1 indicates that application numbers are increasing slightly year to year from 2018-2020.

Figure 1 Count of Students at Each Admission Stage, by Year
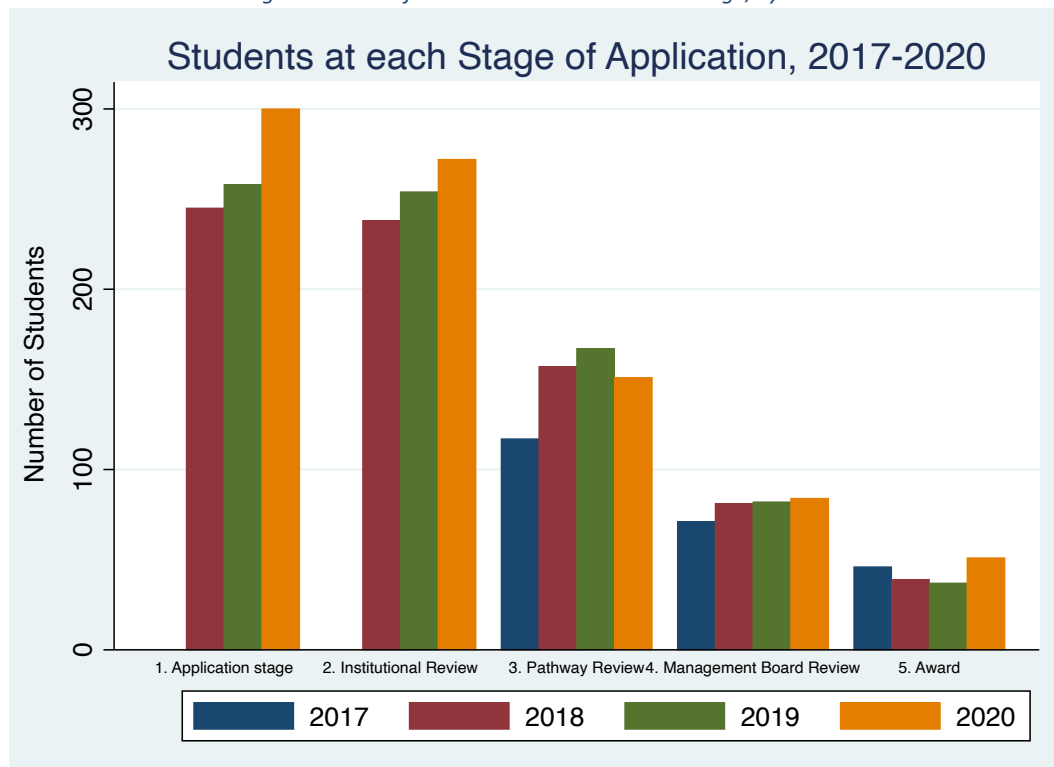
The stages of the admission process offer an opportunity to explore and compare the demographics of applicants as they progress across stages. Across the WP measures present in the SeNSS data, most of the proportions of students remain constant across stages in the admission process. That is, the process seems to be neutral in regard to many WP characteristics.

SeNSS records indicate that in 2018 and 2019 (Figure 2), the proportion of white students receiving awards is greater than we should expect, given the proportion of white applicants. The increase from the first stage (application) to the fifth (award) is approximately 10% in 2018 and approximately 5% in 2019. We also note, however, that **in 2020**, despite a slight change in proportions at the pathway stage, the overall progression from application to award was relatively proportional according to race.

Figure 2 Proportion of Students at Each Admission Stage, by Ethnicity and Year
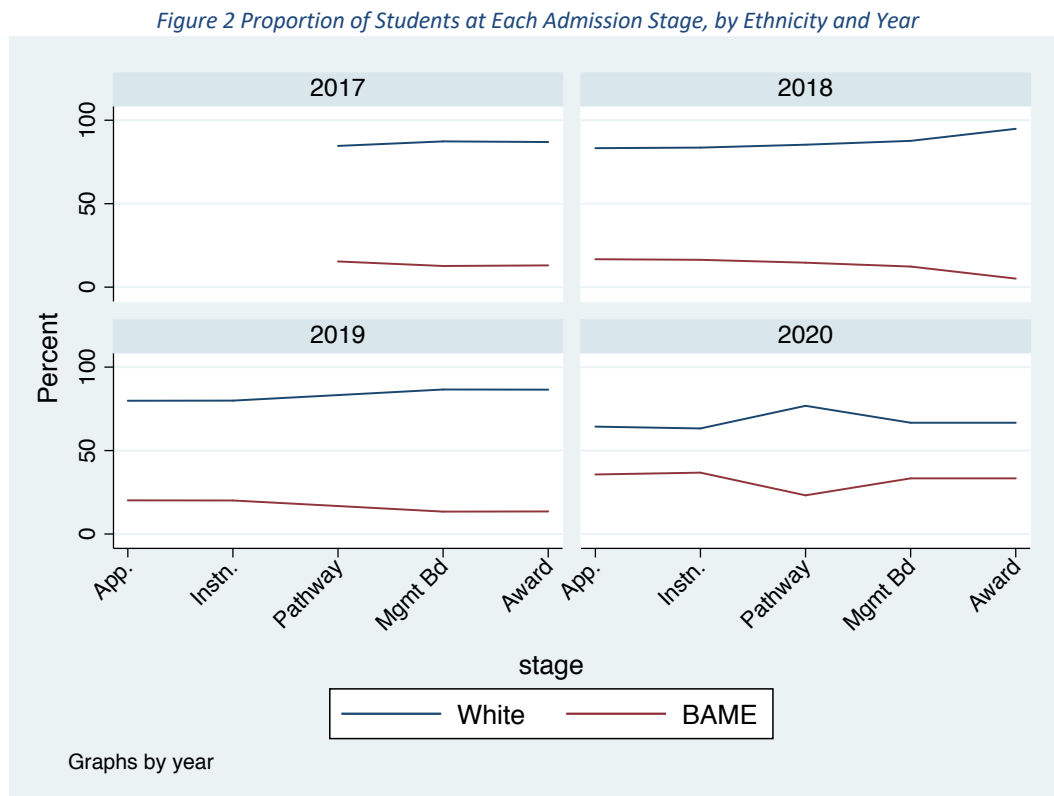
Because we are examining the entire population of SeNSS students, these levels are both statistically and substantively real. Among all years, BAME applicants are 7% less likely than white applicants to reach the award stage. **In 2020,** that difference is reduced to 1.5%.

It should also be noted that the stages associated with Pathway Review and Management Review are the most likely to increase the separation between white and BAME candidates. This finding adds credence to the argument that access to the FluidReview system may be acting as a gatekeeping mechanism in the application process.

Figure 3 shows progression by the intersection of ethnicity and gender. From 2018-2020, we can see that white females (the blue line) increase in proportion from one stage to the next; that is, white females have a higher chance of receiving a SeNSS fellowship than any other race-gender group. Meanwhile, BAME males have the lowest chance; the yellow line decreases in height from one stage to the next.

*Figure 3 Proportion of Students at Each Admission Stage, by Ethnicity, Gender, and Year*
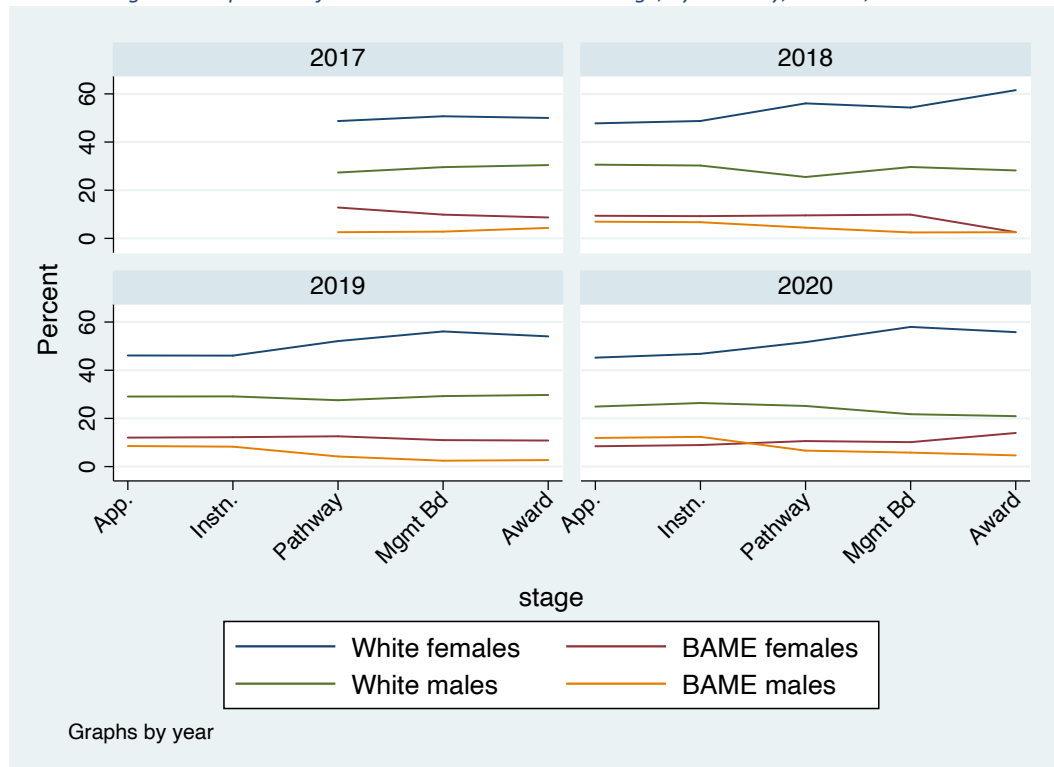
Across all years, white females have a: 42% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME females; 28% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than white males; and 55% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME males.

The differences reflect greater equity **in 2020**, where white females have a: 20% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME females; 30% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than white males; and 18% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME males.

It should also be noted that the stages associated with Pathway Review and Management Review are the most likely to increase the separation between white females and BAME males versus other candidates. This finding adds credence to the argument that access to the FluidReview system may be acting as a gatekeeping mechanism in the application process.

Figure 4 shows trends across the stage according to School type. The admission process progressively diminishes the proportion of applicants who went to school outside the UK.

Figure 4 Proportion of Students at Each Admission Stage, by School Type and Year
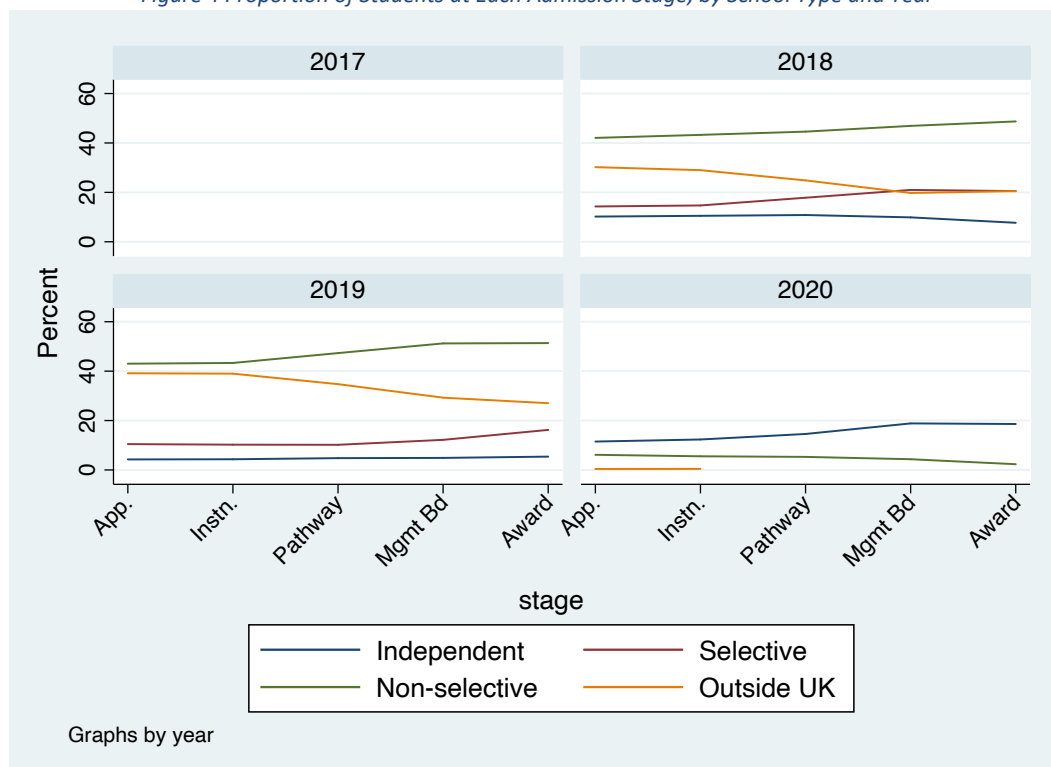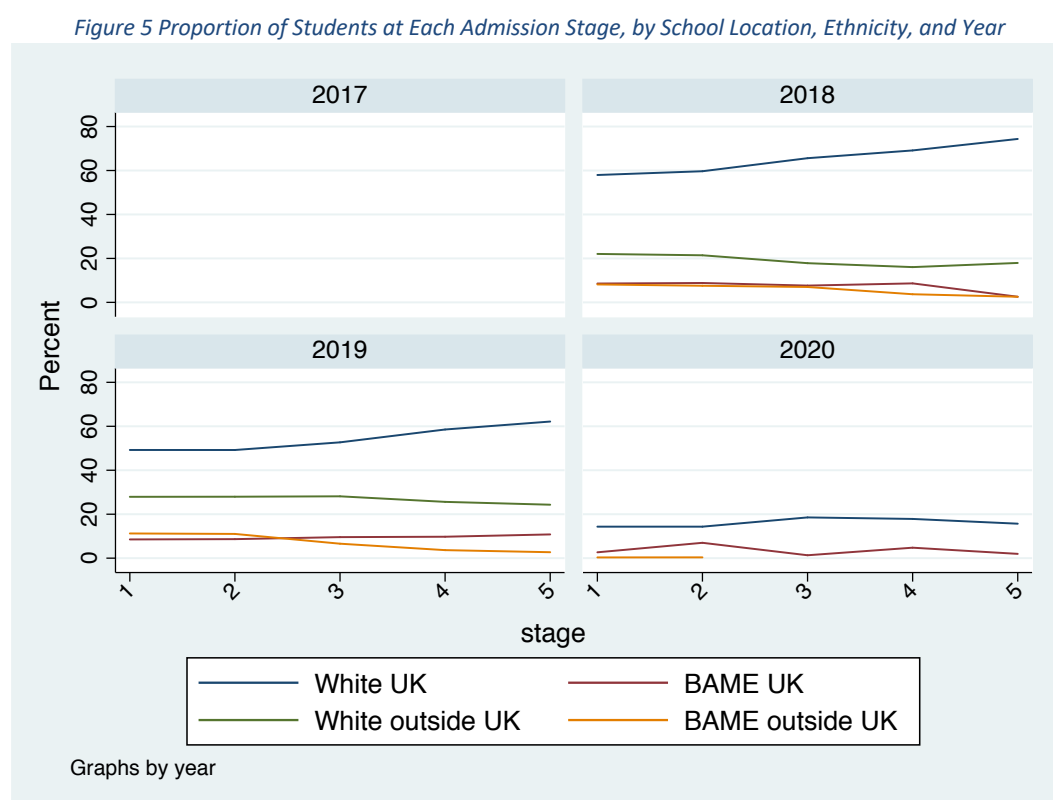
Across all years, applicants who attended secondary school outside the UK have: 10% lower chance of receiving a fellowship than applicants who attended selective secondary schools; 5% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than applicants who attended non-selective secondary schools; and 20% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than applicants who attended independent secondary schools.

In 2020, applicants who attended secondary school outside the UK have a: 18% lower chance of receiving a fellowship than applicants who attended selective secondary schools; 58% lower chance of receiving a fellowship than applicants who attended non-selective secondary schools; and 14% lower chance of receiving a fellowship than applicants who attended independent secondary schools.

It should also be noted that the stages associated with Pathway Review and Management Review are the most likely to inhibit the progress of candidates outside the UK. This finding adds credence to the argument that access to the FluidReview system may be acting as a gatekeeping mechanism in the application process.

Figure 5 shows that the decline in the proportion of non-white applicants primarily affects the proportion of those who went to school outside the UK.

Figure 5 Proportion of Students at Each Admission Stage, by School Location, Ethnicity, and Year

Across all years, Whites who studied secondary school in the UK have: 64% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME applicants who studied secondary school in the UK; 52% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than Whites who studied secondary school outside the UK; and 69% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME applicants who studied secondary school outside the UK.

In 2020, White applicants who studied secondary school in the UK have: 78% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME applicants who studied secondary school in the UK and 89% higher chance of receiving a fellowship than BAME applicants studying secondary school outside the UK. There were no applications from Whites who studied secondary school outside in the UK in 2020. It should be noted that the applications for 2020 were submitted in January, during the same month as Brexit.

It should also be noted that the stages associated with Pathway Review and Management Review are the most likely to increase the separation between white applicants from outside the UK and other candidates. This finding adds credence to the argument that access to the FluidReview system may be acting as a gatekeeping mechanism in the application process.

Figure 6 shows the admissions stages for 2020, the only year for which there is data available according to program structure. The potential structures are +3, +4, and 1+3. One of the points of ring-fencing 1+3 awards was to counteract any potential bias toward applicants who already have masters degrees.


Figure 6 Proportion of Students at Each Admission Stage, by Program Structure and Ethnicity (2020)
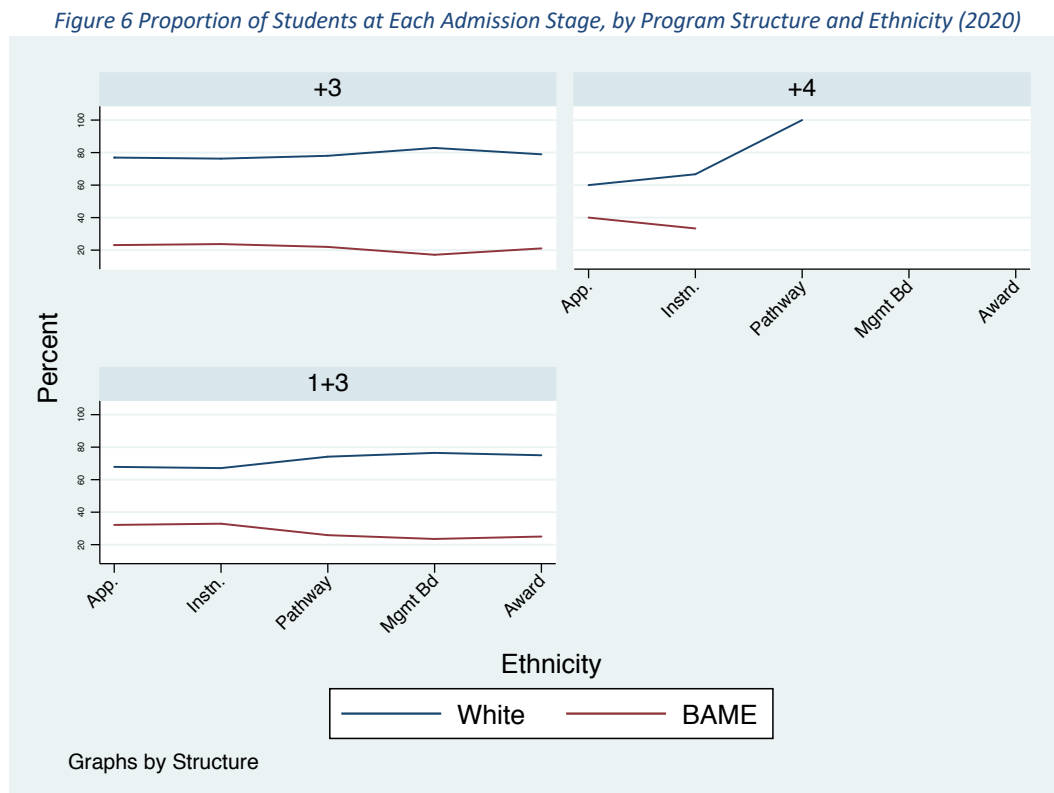
We see that when the structure is +3, white applicants are (78%-23%=) 55% more likely to apply than BAME applicants and (79%-21%=) 58% more likely to receive an award than BAME applicants. The difference between these differences (58%-55% = 3%) means that White applicants were 3% more likely to make it through all 5 stages of the +3 process than BAME applicants in 2020.

When the structure is +4, white applicants are (60-40=) 20% more likely to apply than BAME applicants, and (100%-0%=) 100% more likely to make it to the Pathway stage than BAME applicants. The difference between these differences (100%-20% = 80%) means that White applicants were 80% more likely to make it to the Pathway stage of the +4 process than BAME applicants in 2020. In 2020, however, no +4 applicants made it past the Pathway stage.

When the structure is 1+3, white applicants are (68%-32%=) 36% more likely to apply than BAME applicants, and (73%-27%=) 46% more likely to receive an award than BAME applicants. The difference between these differences (46%-36% = 10%) means that White applicants were 10% more likely to make it through all 5 stages of the 1+3 process than BAME applicants in 2020.

The SeNSS core team might also be interested to know whether the different structures appeal to students differently according to ethnicity. Looking at the same information as in Figure 6, but presented according to ethnicity rather than structure, we can see the likelihood of people of a particular ethnicity applying to a given structure. Figure 7 shows the data in this way.

Figure 7 Proportion of Students at Each Admission Stage, by Ethnicity and Program Structure (2020)
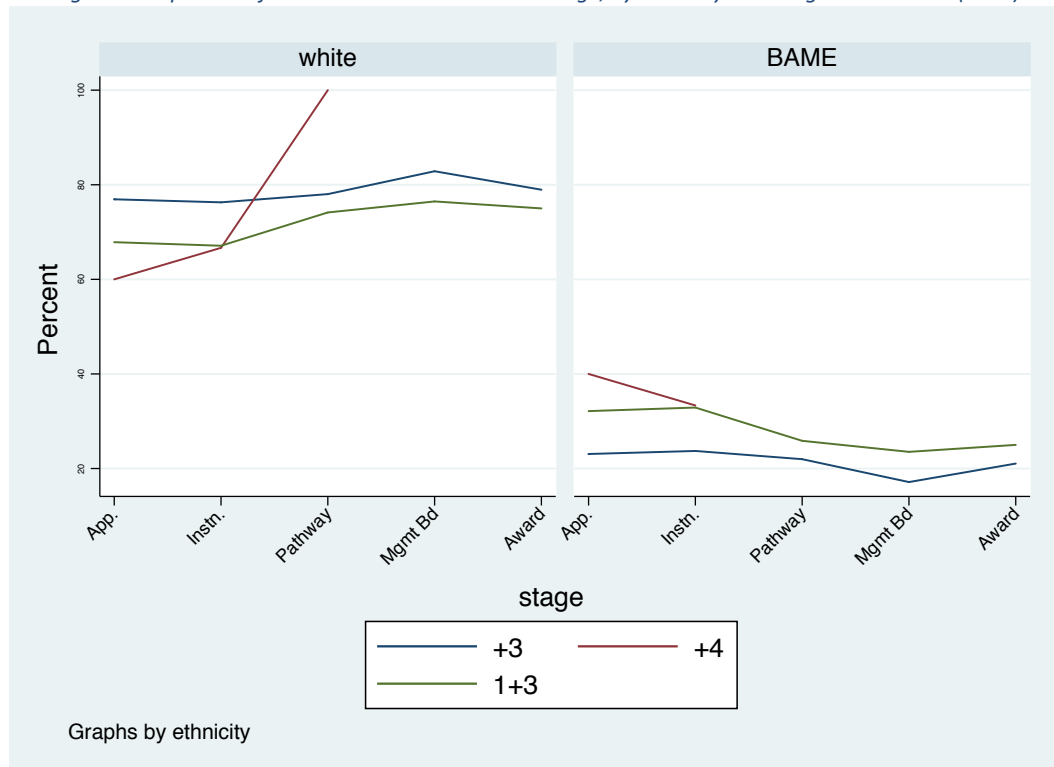
Note that for white candidates are more likely to apply for and receive +3 studentships than any other type. Specifically, white candidates are (77%-68%=) 9% more likely to apply to +3 than to 1+3, and (77%-60%=) 17% more likely to apply to +3 than to +4.

Conversely, BAME candidates are more likely to apply for +4 studentships than any other type, and more likely to receive 1+3 studentships than any other type. BAME candidates are (40%-32%=) 8% more likely to apply to +4 than to 1+3, and (40%-23%=) 17% more likely to apply to +4 than to +3. BAME candidates are (25%-21%=) 4% more likely to receive a 1+3 award than a +3 award.

Based on the 2020 data, **it appears that ring-fencing a certain number of 1+3 studentships did attract more applications from BAME candidates.** Continuing this ring-fencing in future years will give more clarity to this relationship and determine whether it persists over time.

4.2.1 Comparison of SeNSS studentship to National Averages

We can compare the WP characteristics of the final student population that was awarded a SeNSS scholarship against the UK average of PgR students in SeNSS related studies, and those in SeNSS partner institutions. To be eligible to the SeNSS DTP the student must be UK/EU domiciled, so we restrict the sample of the other two comparison groups accordingly. Note that the graphs do not include the confidence interval for the SeNSS program because we have the entire population of SeNSS program students rather than a sample. In all cases, the first SeNSS bar represents the proportion of successful SeNSS applicants across 2017-2019. The second SeNSS bar represents the proportion of successful students in 2020.

We can compare the proportion of BAME students in the SeNSS program to the proportion of BAME students in PgR studies related to the SeNSS Pathways. Although the mean proportion of BAME students in SeNSS institutions is slightly larger than that in non-SeNSS institutions, the proportion of BAME students in the SeNSS program prior to 2020 is significantly and substantively smaller than both groups of comparison. **In 2020** this proportion jumps to approximately 20% higher than in SeNSS institutions from 2017-2020.
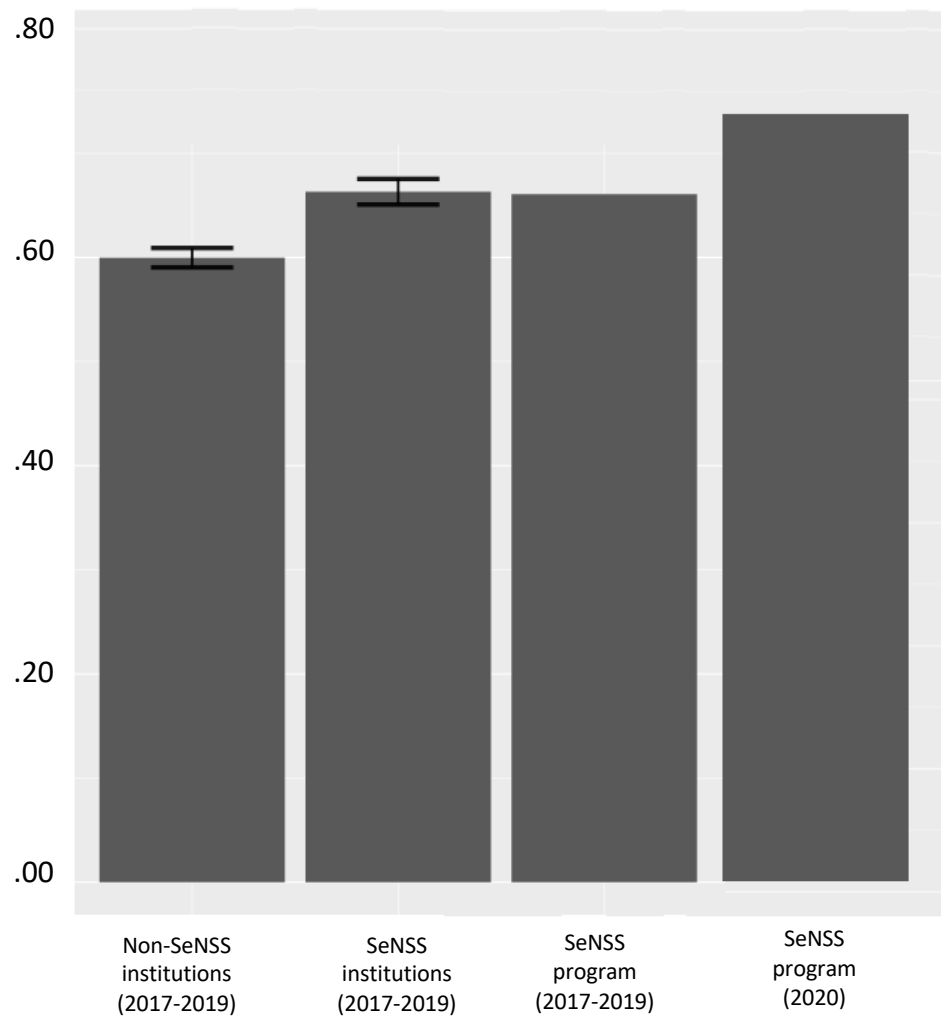
Figure 8 Mean Proportion of BAME Students by Institution/Program
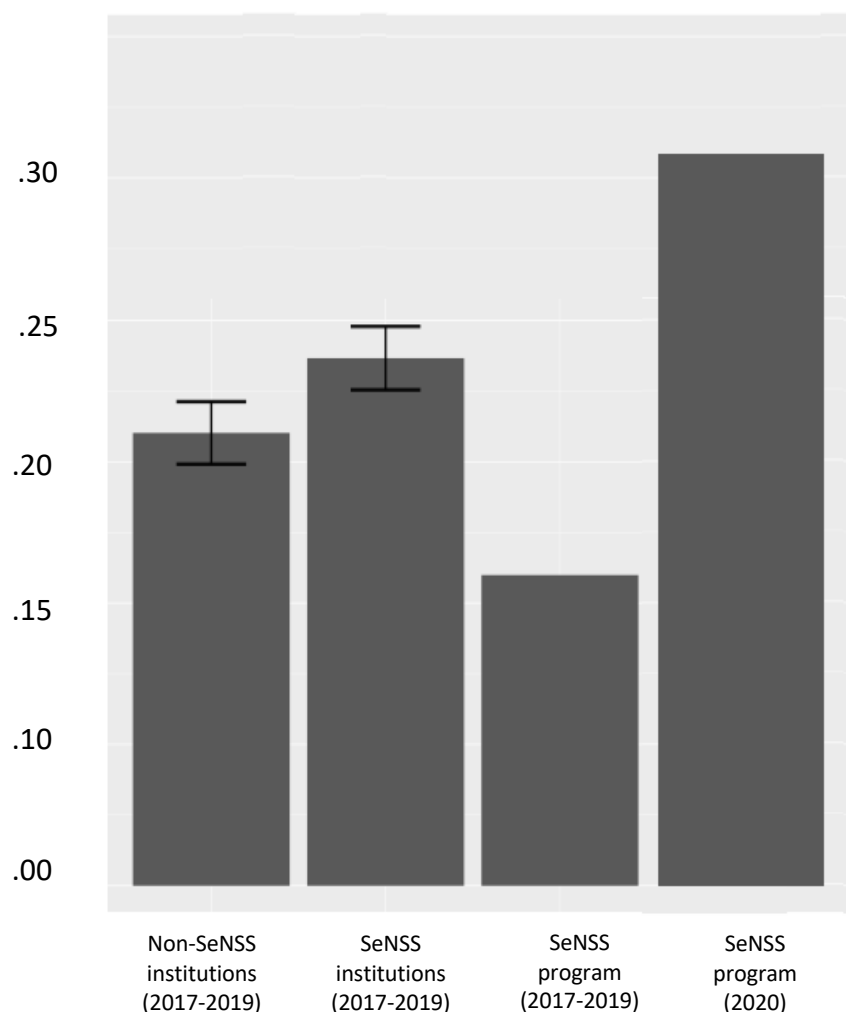
The proportion of female students in the SeNSS program from 2017-2019 is statistically identical to that in SeNSS institutions. Both are higher than in the Non-SeNSS group.

In 2020, the proportion of female students jumps to roughly 8% higher than the previous average.

*Figure 9 Mean Proportion of Female Students in by Institution/Program*

An intersectional analysis reveals that both SeNSS and Non-SeNSS institutions exhibit higher proportions of white females than BAME females. In this case, the SeNSS-DTP does not conform from 2017-2019, but does follow the common trend **in 2020**. Figure 8 shows that the proportion of female students is basically the same across ethnic groups in the SeNSS program from 2017-2019, but 11% higher for white females than black females **in 2020**.

Figure 10 Mean Proportion of Students in by Institution/Program by Gender and Race/Ethnicity
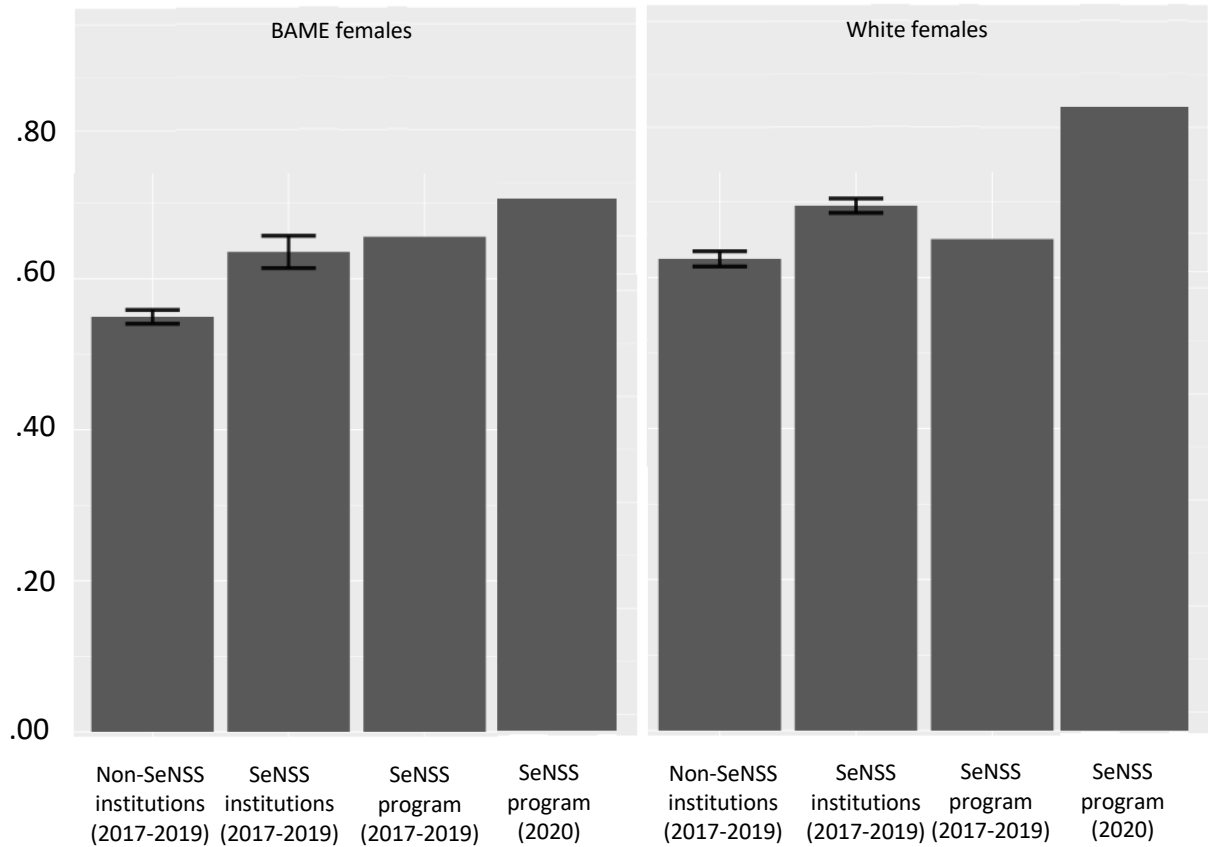
We can also compare the groups by the proportion of students whose parents have no higher education degree. Students in the SeNSS program have a substantially higher proportion of parents with no HE degree than both comparison groups, and across all years. Strikingly, SeNSS partner institutions have the lowest proportion of PgR students in SeNSS Pathway related studies whose parents have no HE degree. This proportion definitively eclipses that of all UK HEIs.

Figure 11 Mean Proportion of Students in SeNSS, by Institution/Program and Parental Education
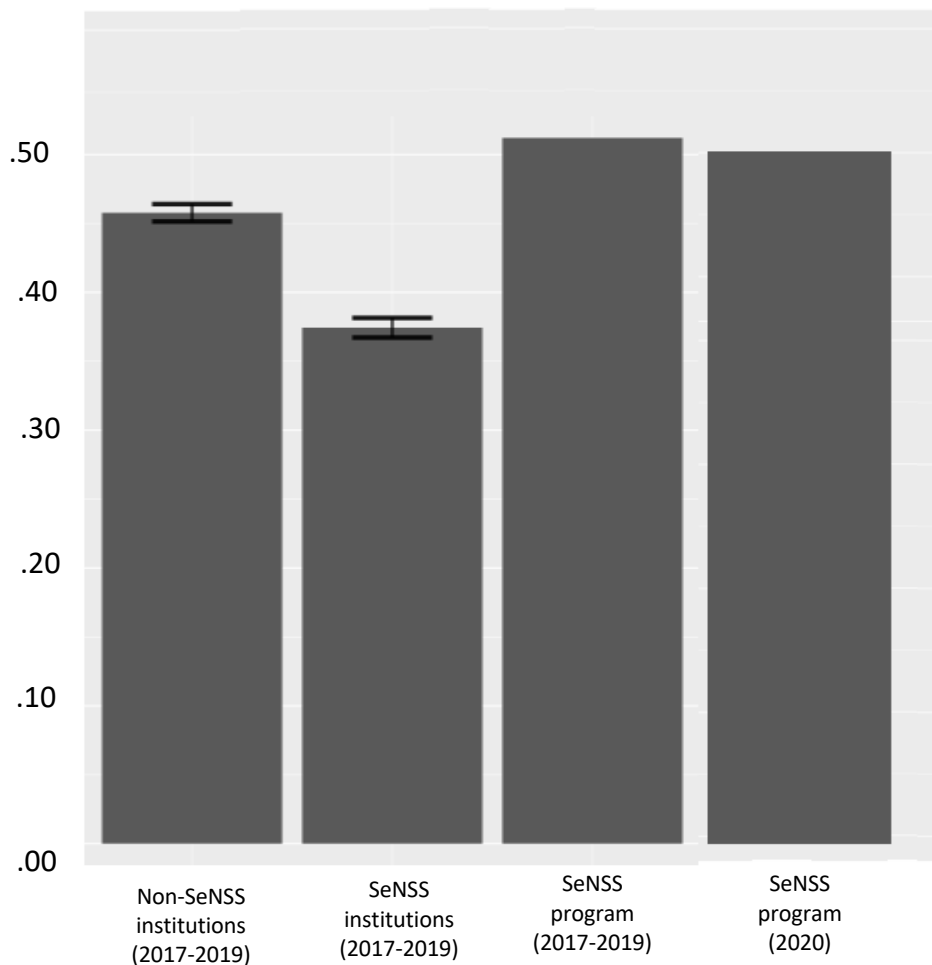
There are no more socio-economic WP characteristics on both HESA and SeNSS datasets to continue comparisons on indicators of socio-economic status. While parental education can be a proxy for socio-economic status, it would be best to compare by Polar4 quantiles. Postcodes were collected from SeNSS applicants' EDI forms beginning **in 2020**. Applicants were asked for the postcode of the home they were living in when they applied for their undergraduate studies. Although we cannot compare these to HESA data, we can describe them here so they can be used for subsequent analyses and comparisons.

Figure 12 Mean Proportion of Students in SeNSS, by Institution/Program and Parental Education
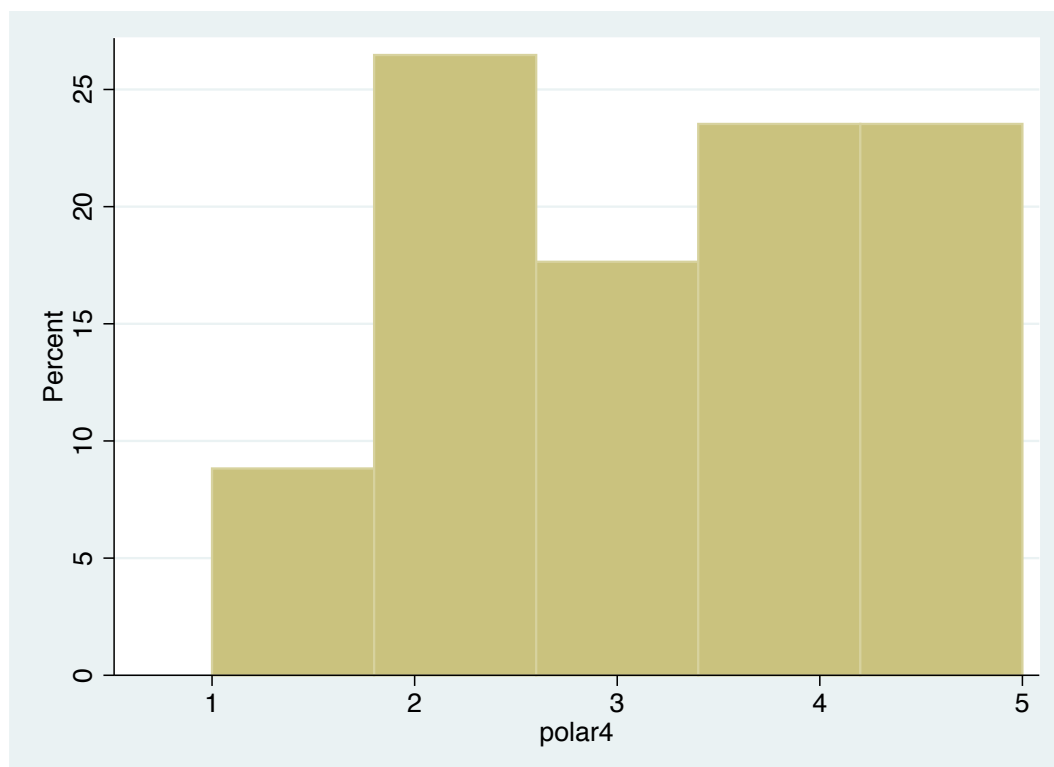

Figure 12 shows the mean proportion of SeNSS fellowship recipients according to POLAR4 quintile. We use Quintiles 1-2 to indicate Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs). In 2020, 35% of SeNSS fellowships were awarded to students who applied to their undergraduate program from a home in a Quantile 1 or 2 neighbourhood. Forty-six percent of SeNSS fellowships were awarded to students who applied to their undergraduate program from a home in quantiles 4 or 5.

The proportion of students stating they have a disability in the SeNSS program is significantly higher than in both comparison groups, regardless of year, although the proportion is approximately 4% lower in 2020 than in 2017-19.

Figure 13 Mean Proportion of Disability Students by Institution/Program
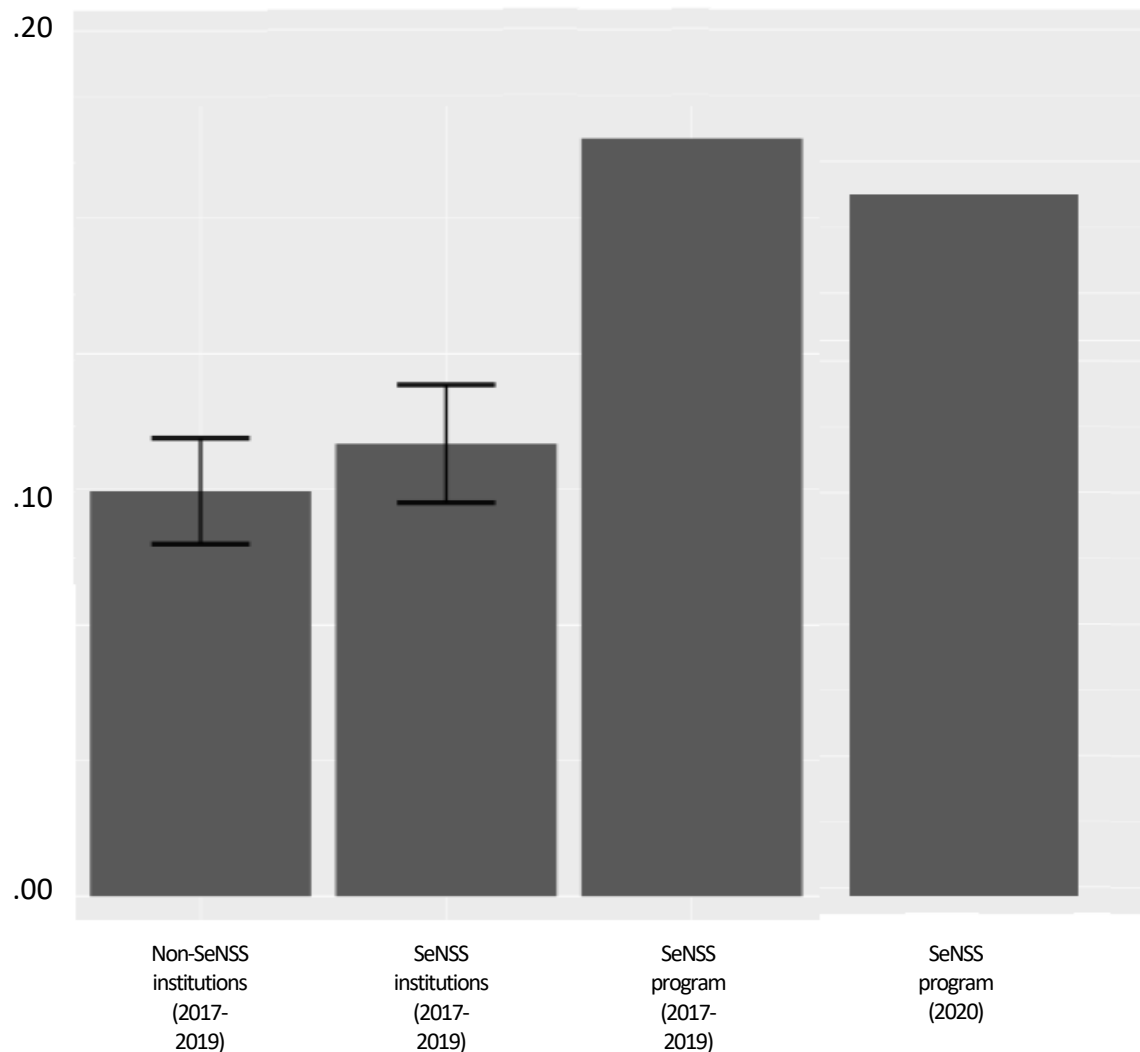
In 2020, students were asked whether they had or would claim DSA. Fifty percent of those who applied said that they had or would.

4.3 HESA Data

The HESA data allows us to compare WP characteristics by several important groups: level of study; institution of study; subject of study; whether or not the University is a SeNSS partner; and whether or not the subject of study is covered by the SeNSS Pathways. The figures below present the means and 95% confidence intervals for: various proportions within non-SeNSS institutions; the average of SeNSS partner institutions; and the individual Universities.

This data was acquired via a purchase agreement with HESA and as such, cannot be re-analysed or shared outside of the research for the 2019 Report. The numbers given based on the HESA data are therefore based on averages across 2017-2019. An extra bar representing the 2020 SeNSS fellowship cohort is also added to facilitate comparison. The graphs represent are a subset of subjects of study covered by the SeNSS Pathways. Referring to the graphs below, we point out a series of findings.

4.3.1 Singular Characteristics

We first examine each characteristic on its own. The proportion of black, Asian, and other minority ethnic (BAME) groups in PgR is similar between non-SeNSS and SeNSS partner institutions (Figure 14). City University of London and Roehampton have the highest proportion of BAME students in PgR, while UEA has the lowest, amongst SeNSS partner institutions. The 2020 SeNSS cohort eclipses all of these universities in its proportion of BAME students.

*Figure 14 Mean Proportion of BAME Students in SeNSS-Related Studies (PgR)*
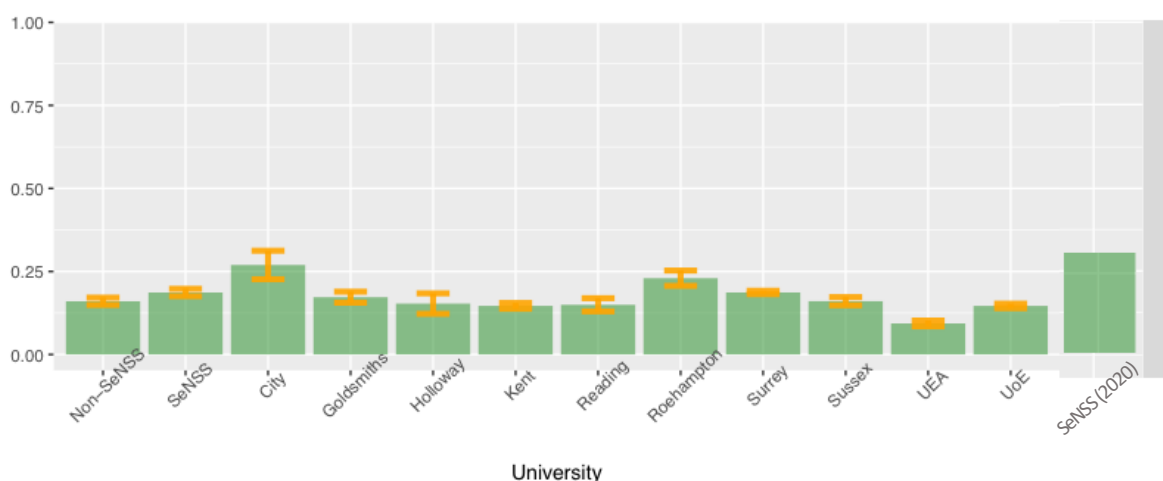
Second, the proportion of female students in PgR is higher in SeNSS partners than in non-SeNSS institutions. Interestingly, Roehampton seems to be responsible for that difference, with close to 70% proportion of female students. All other SeNSS partner institutions female proportions are between to the 60% general mark and 50%, with the exception being Sussex's percentage which comes in just under 50% (

Figure 15). The 2020 SeNSS cohort eclipses all of these universities in its proportion of female students.

Figure 15 Mean Proportion of Female Students in SeNSS-related Studies (PgR)
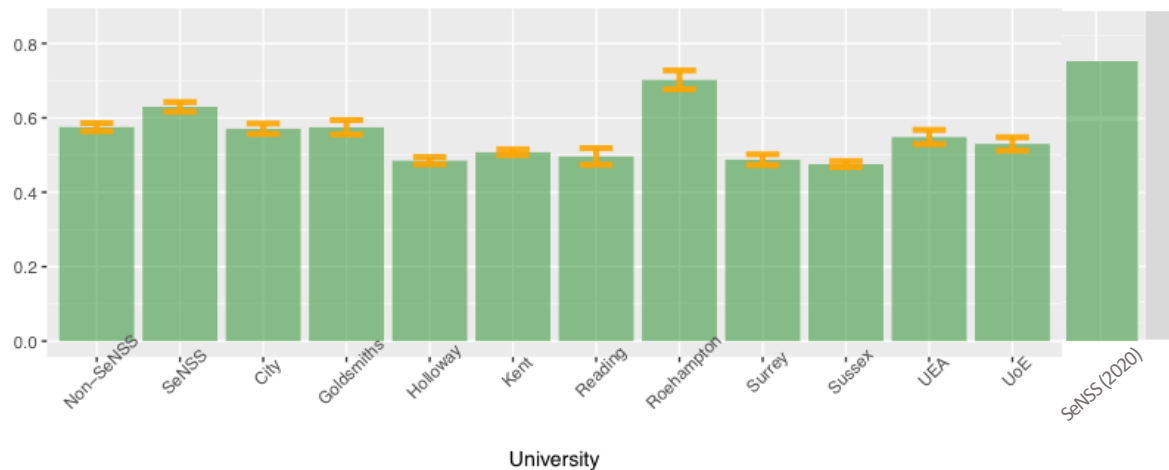

Third, in terms of low participation neighborhood students (using Polar4 Q1 and Q2), the proportion of SeNSS partner institutions is significantly lower than the non-SeNSS average (Figure 16). Some individual universities are very close to the 20% global average (Reading and Essex), while Kent and UEA have proportions closer to 30%. City University and Goldsmiths have the lowest proportion of LPN students, close to 5%. The 2020 SeNSS cohort eclipses all of these universities in its proportion of LPN students by this definition.

*Figure 16 Mean Proportion of LPN Students in SeNSS-related Studies*
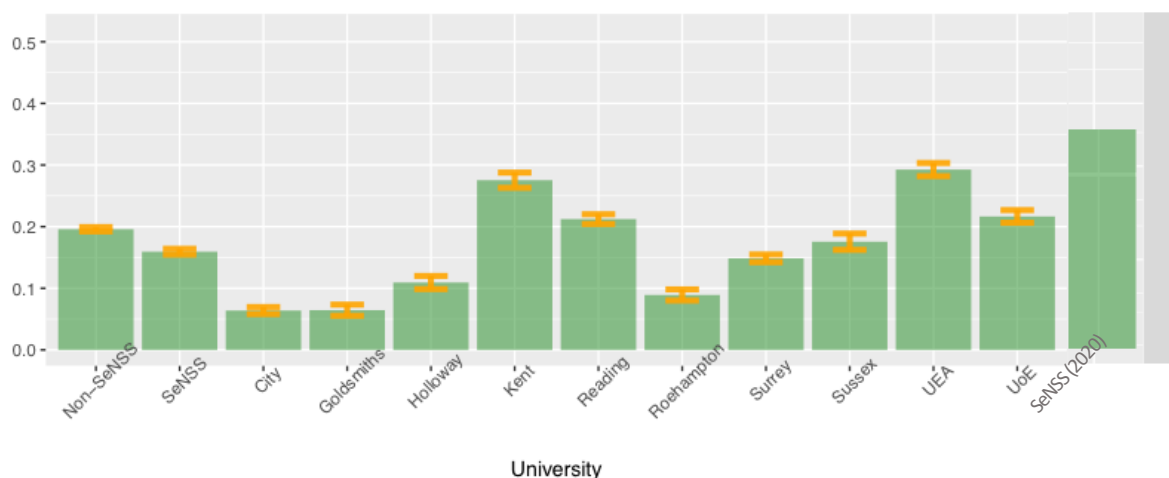
Fourth, when it comes to students whose parents did not obtain a higher education degree, the proportion of SeNSS partner institutions is lower than the non-SeNSS average. All the individual SeNSS partner institutions have lower proportions, with Sussex the closest to the global average, and Goldsmiths the lowest average proportion (Figure 17). It should be noted that Roehampton has very wide confidence intervals, which is based on large changes across years. The 2020 SeNSS cohort eclipses all of these universities in its proportion of students with parents who do not have a higher education degree.

Figure 17 of Students Whose Parents do not have HE in SeNSS-related Studies
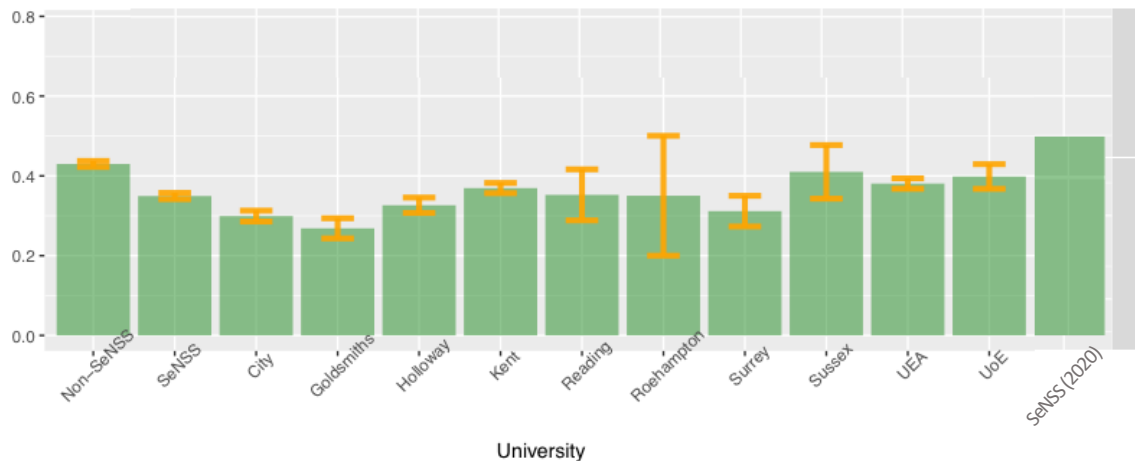

Fifth, the proportion of students with a disability in SeNSS partner institutions is higher than the non-SeNSS average, but with overlapping confidence intervals, denoting variation across time (Figure 18). Goldsmiths has the highest proportion with an average mean close to 12%, while City and UoE have the lowest proportions, with average means close to 5%. The 2020 SeNSS cohort eclipses all of these universities in its proportion of students who declare having a disability.

Figure 18 Mean Proportion Students with a Disability in SeNSS-related Studies
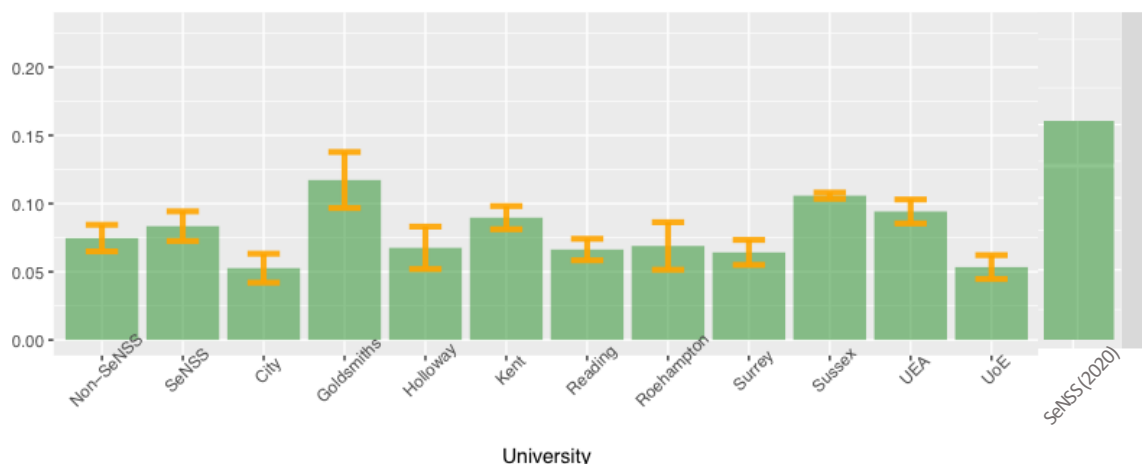
Finally, looking at the proportion of mature students (aged over 30) we should restrict the comparison to PgR students and take notice that these numbers are of total FPE registered students, not only admitted PgR students (Figure 19). There is wide variation in the proportion of mature students across universities, but it is difficult to know whether that reflects more mature students being admitted into PgR studies, or simply longer programs. SeNSS institutions have lower proportions of mature PgR students than non-SeNSS institutions, with Royal Holloway and UEA exhibiting the lowest percentages, and Goldsmiths and Roehampton the highest. In this case, the 2020 SeNSS cohort exceeds the average of all institutions, with approximately 72% mature students (older than 29 years old).

Figure 19 Mean Proportion of Mature Students in SeNSS-related Studies
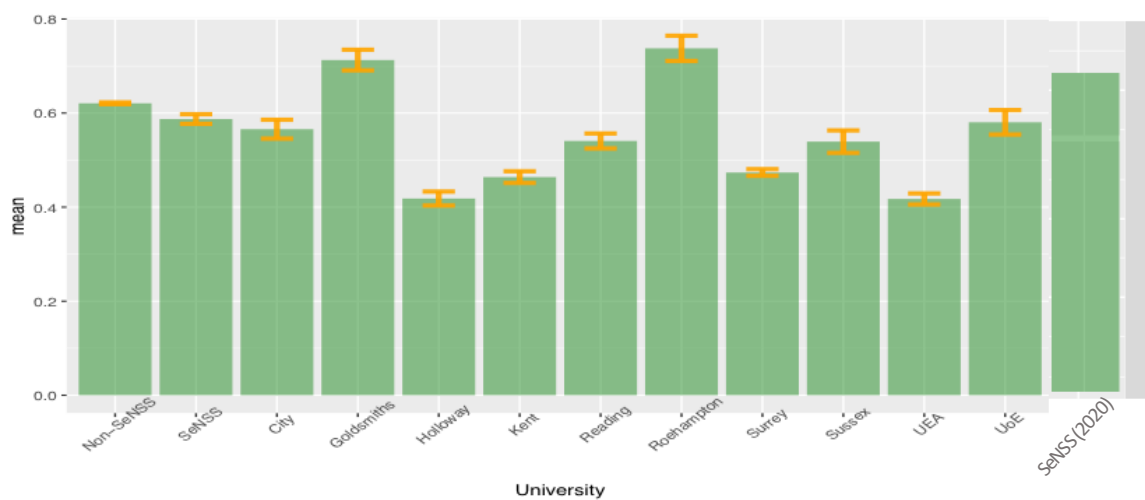
4.3.2 Intersected Characteristics

Intersectionality is the combination of two or more social identities into one social identity group (Shields 2008). Intersectionality scholarship argues that social categories are interdependent, and that race, class, and gender constitute each other and each other's effects on outcomes. We therefore examine intersections of WP and diversity characteristics.

In the graphs that follow, each bar represents the proportion of students that fit into a particular intersectional category. For example, in Figure 20, we see a graph of mature student proportions. The left-most bar shows that approximately 63% of LPN PgR students in non-SeNSS institutions are mature students. The second bar shows that just under 70% of non-LPN PgR students in non-SeNSS institutions are mature students. We can then compare the height of the bars of SeNSS institutions (aggregate or individually) to see how they compare to the average of non-SeNSS institutions. In the 2020 SeNSS class, the proportion of mature students in both LPN and non-LPN groups exceeds the full university average.

In terms of LPN, the proportions of mature students in the non-SeNSS group differ slightly (Figure 20). In the SeNSS group, the proportion of mature students is higher for non-LPN, a trend that we find overall in most individual universities, except in particular at Roehampton, where both proportions are high. For City, Kent, Reading, and UEA, the proportions of mature students are similar between LPN groups. In the 2020 SeNSS class, the proportion of mature students in both LPN and non-LPN groups falls within the average range.

POLAR4 classifications, which are used to determine LPN status, are assigned when students first enter into HE, and should reflect the neighborhood where they grew up[12]. Accordingly, graduate students keep their original POLAR4 classification, if they had one. Overseas students that enter into the UK HE system do not receive a POLAR4 classification if they applied from outside the UK. Yet students who grew up overseas but are now living in the UK can enter into graduate programs and receive a POLAR4 classification based on their current domicile. This phenomenon can potentially skew any analysis, but will be particularly significant for mature PgR students. Unfortunately, with HESA data there is no sure way to separate LPN status according to when in a student's life it was given. Results should be interpreted with this in mind when comparing with data from the 2020 SeNSS cohort. Proportions indicate that 66% of SeNSS LPN students are mature students, while 77% of SeNSS non-LPN students are mature students.

Examining the proportions of mature PgR students by parental HE (Figure 21), the differences flip. In the 2020 SeNSS cohort as well as the Non-SeNSS and SeNSS groups, the proportion of mature PgR students is higher for the group of students whose parent do not have a higher education degree. This could mean that students whose parents without HE take longer to enter into PgR studies, or that they stay longer.

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[12] See: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students#low-participation-neighbourhoods-polar4.

Figure 20 Mean Proportion of Mature PgR Students by LPN in SeNSS-related Studies
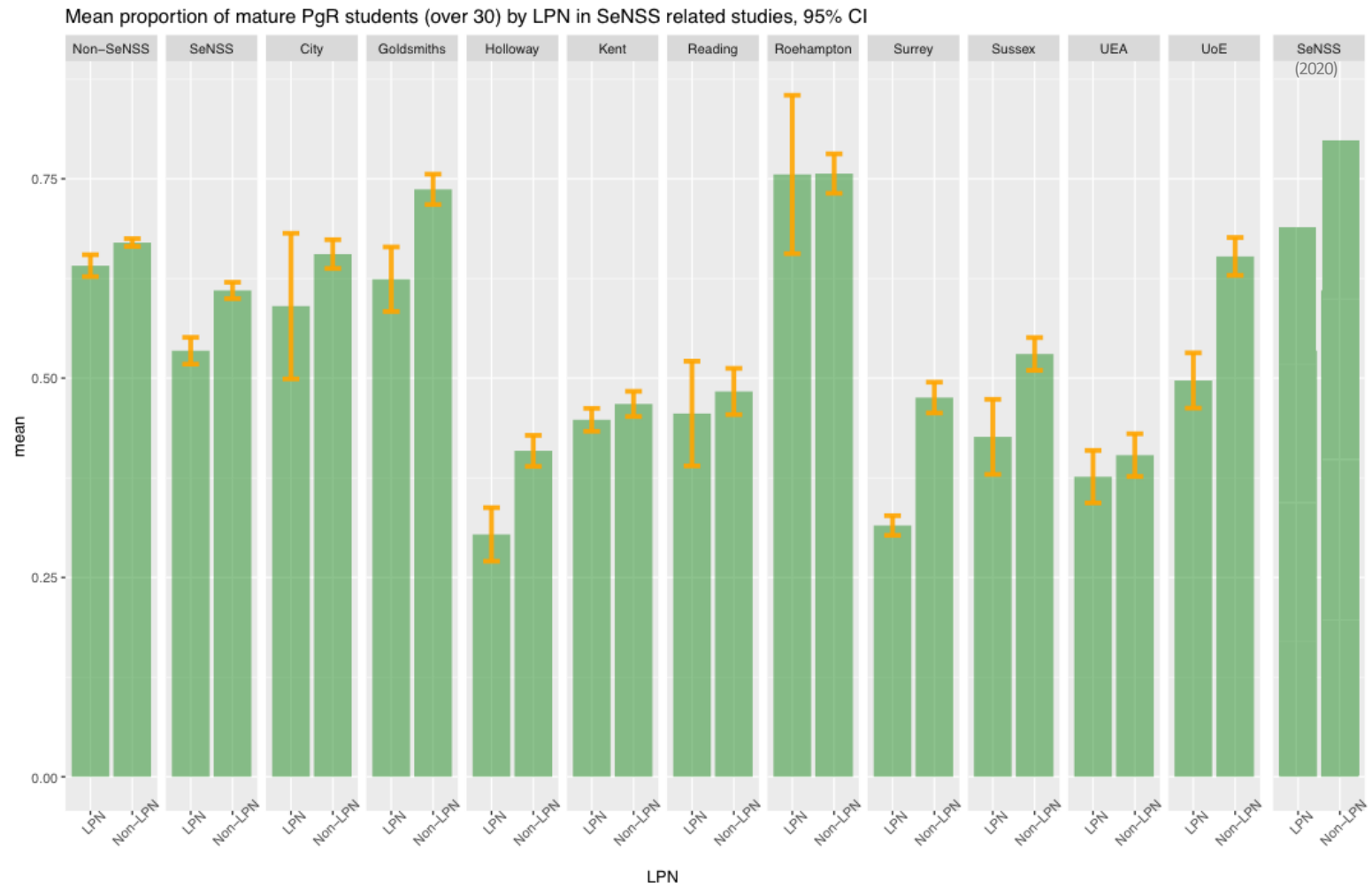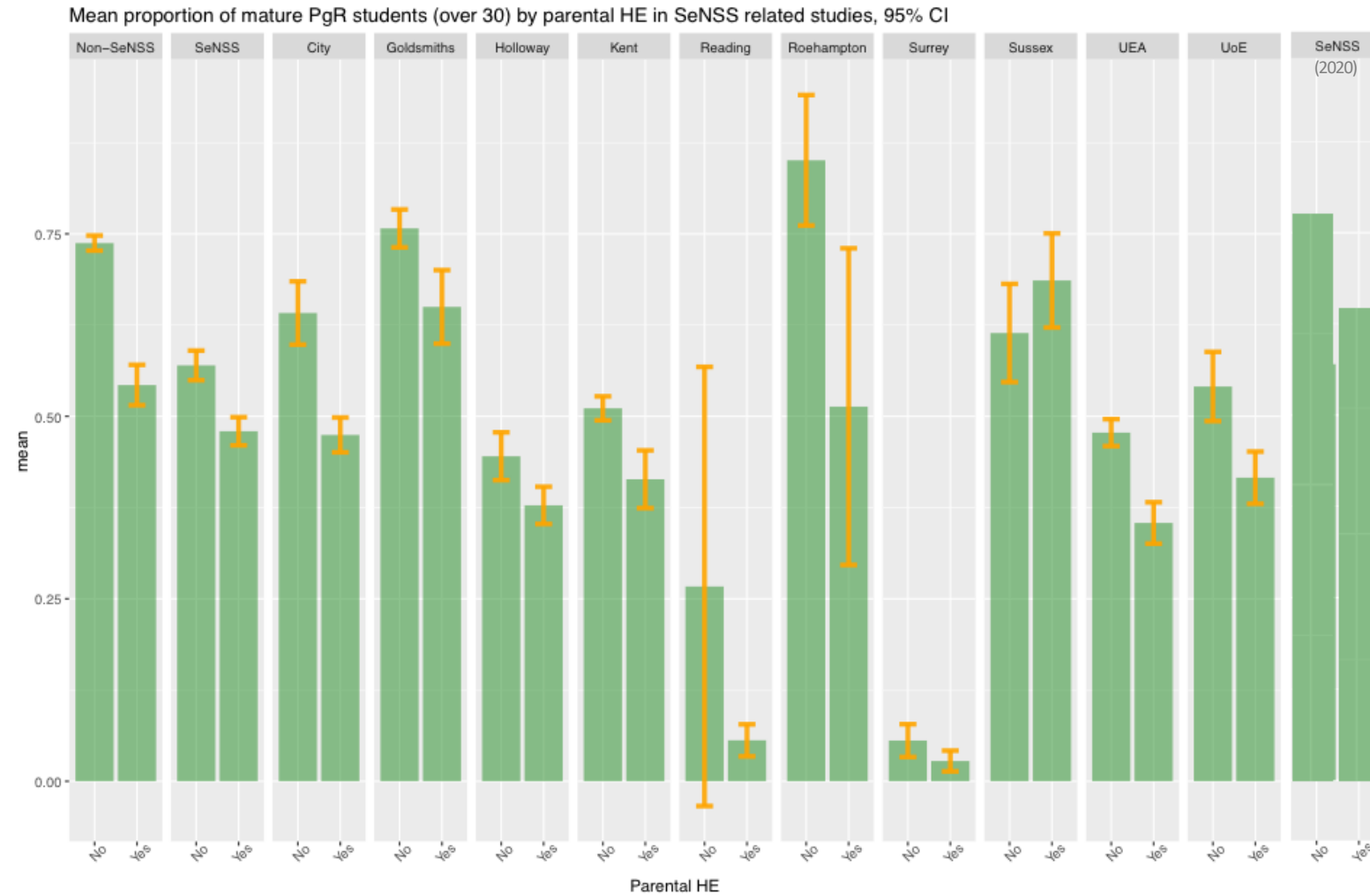
Figure 21 Mean Proportion of Mature PgR Students by Parental HE in SeNSS-related Studies

Mean proportion of mature PgR students (over 30) by parental HE in SeNSS related studies, 95% CI

5 Observations and Recommendations

Based on the information reported and the subsequent analyses, we offer a few observations and recommendations.

5.1.1 Observations: Comparing the 2020 SeNSS Cohort to SeNSS member universities

Based on the comparisons with the 2020 SeNSS cohort, the collection of new EDI data has been revealing. Although we cannot know how previous cohorts compare to the national and SeNSS university 2017-2019 averages, we can say that the 2020 SeNSS cohort has eclipsed the others in the following ways:

1. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of BAME students of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions.
2. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of female students of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions.
3. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of LPN students of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2).
4. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of students whose parents do not have a higher education degree, compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2).
5. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of students with declared disabilities of either the SeNSS (individual/average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2).
6. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of mature students compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (defined as older than 29 years old).
7. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of mature students in both LPN and non-LPN groups, compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (LPN defined as POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2; mature defined as older than 29 years old).
8. The 2020 SeNSS cohort has the highest proportion of mature students in both groups of students whose parents have higher education degrees and those who do not, compared to either the SeNSS (average) or non-SeNSS (average) institutions (mature defined as older than 29 years old).
9. In the 2020 SeNSS cohort, BAME students were more likely to apply to 1+3 studentships than to +3 studentships, and BAME students had higher award rates for their 1+3 applications than for +3 or +4 applications.

5.1.2 Recommendation: Review twitter campaign strategy and utility

The live twitter sessions generated an average of 3-4 questions per session. One applicant reported learning of the SeNSS competition via twitter. These numbers suggest that the use of twitter may not be the best allocation of SeNSS resources. It is possible that twitter, including hashtags, following, and retweeting, can be a useful resource for reaching new applicants; such an outcome would take substantially targeted efforts. We recommend that twitter be reviewed as a means of outreach,

with an eye to either restructuring the usage and strategy, or to replacing twitter with another method that suits the resources and skills available.

5.1.3 Recommendation: Further develop the EDI form to collect more detail.

The new SeNSS forms are much more detailed and offer the ability to interrogate applicant data more deeply vis-à-vis the Leadership's WP goals. Still, it appears that most students apply based on recommendation from their existing university. Data for cohorts beyond 2020 will reveal whether this balance with online search engines and social media changes over time, so should continue to be tracked to enable assessment of the central SeNSS WP activities.

The mention of Sussex more than twice as often as any other particular university raises the question of whether some university staff members are more actively promoting the SeNSS opportunity than others. We cannot know whether this is the case, given that 162 applicants chose "university" as their source of information without designating a particular university. Therefore, the EDI form should include more detailed options for students to choose where they learned about SeNSS, including an option for each SeNSS member institution as well as "other university".

5.1.4 Recommendation: Consider reaching out to develop and encourage SeNSS Champions in member institutions via seminars and one-to-one conversations.

More detailed information on the specific universities generating more applications may point to internal university staff members as key champions of the program. If so, SeNSS could potentially boost participation by offering training/information sessions with departments and academic staff within its own member institutions, and within other universities, with relatively low cost. Efforts to widen participation could then be targeted at programs to orient existing key champions, and to educate/orient other possible champions, as well.

5.1.5 Recommendation: Discuss desirable targets for various groups and sub-groups and consider whether a system of contextual offers should be developed.

Now that data enables the comparison of SeNSS numbers to the averages of member institutions and nationally, it is worthwhile to discuss the targets desired by SeNSS (the 2019 ARISE report details several of the options and implications of these decisions). If desirable targets can be agreed for the DTP, it is possible that contextual offers, such as those used in undergraduate admissions, could be employed. Since there is little inter-university agreement about what contextual offers should consist of or be based on, it will be incumbent upon the SeNSS core team to determine what information should factor into the decision, how contextual offers should be allocated, and what a contextual offer would mean.

5.1.6 Recommendation: Further discuss how FluidReview access could be standardised.

The above analysis examines data on the progression of applicants through the stages of the SeNSS admissions process according to ethnicity, gender, secondary school type, and intersectional groups. At the same time, the information provided by SeNSS member institutions reflects wide variation in the rigor with which access is given. Further conversations should take place about the extent to which the existing

processes could be brought more into alignment across institutions. Those member institutions who do not wish to implement a change should specify what sort of data/information they would need to be convinced of the gatekeeping potential, so that a proper research design could be developed to investigate the issue, with clear actions to follow once results were delivered.

5.1.7 Recommendation: Continue to ring-fence 1+3 studentships as a WP strategy.

Though one year of data is not enough to establish definite conclusions, the 2020 data indicates that BAME students are more likely to apply to, and be successful in receiving, 1+3 awards than any other type. We therefore tentatively conclude that ring-fencing a certain number of 1+3 studentships will attract more BAME applicants, and recommend continuing this ring-fencing and analysing further data accordingly.

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