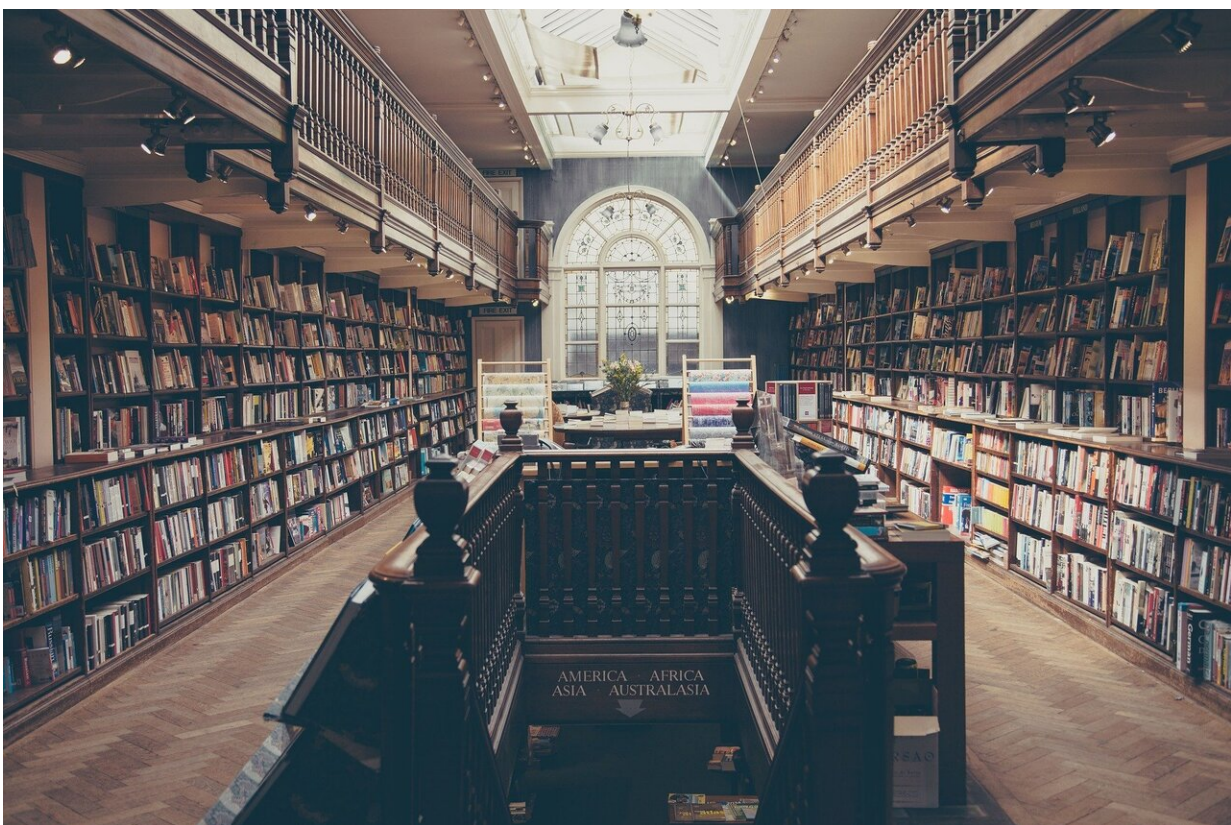# Study: Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds need higher grades to attend top UK law schools

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Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely than their peers to need higher predicted grades to secure a place at one of the

UK's top law schools, a study has revealed.

The study also found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are half as likely to attend the top English law schools as other students.

More research is needed to establish the reasons for this difference, the authors of the study say.

The research, conducted by the University of York Law School in collaboration with the Bridge Group and supported by leading international law firm Clifford Chance, looked at UCAS data for 20 of the most selective law schools in England, as well as the admissions criteria and processes employed by a wider group of the top 30 UK law schools.

More diverse legal profession

The research team found that, while admissions staff at the institutions demonstrated a strong commitment to recruiting a more diverse student body and to supporting the development of a more diverse legal profession, 16 of the 20 (80%) law schools are less likely to accept students from lower socio-economic backgrounds than higher socio-economic backgrounds on their courses.

While the biggest barrier to being accepted across both groups is predicted low grades, applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are accepted by top law schools are significantly more likely than more advantaged students to have been predicted at least AAB in their A Levels.

They are also less likely to receive an offer with qualifications other than A levels such as BTECs. Vocational qualifications alone are only

accepted by two-thirds (65%) of top UK law schools.

Variations in assessment

The research also found considerable differences in the use of information in addition to that provided in UCAS applications. More than a third (35%) of the top UK law schools use the Law National Aptitude Test (LNAT), with variations in how the components of the LNAT are assessed. There was also significant variation in the use of interviews, including whether interviews are required for all, some, or any applicants, and the degree to which they are structured.

The report recommends that law schools undertake some of the following actions:

- Establish a Law Admissions Network for law admissions tutors and professional admissions staff that would support entry by students from less advantaged backgrounds.
- Develop more evidence-based approaches to setting admissions requirements and making decisions about applicants. Each law school should review its own admission data to assess whether applicants from less advantaged backgrounds have an equal chance of success and explore the reasons for any inequalities.
- Develop a better understanding of contextual admissions. Linking in with employers of law graduates will promote greater consistency of approach between higher education and employers.
- Share admissions policy, practice, internal evaluation and research internally with colleagues in other professional social science subjects, such as economics and business.
- Consult with university colleagues responsible for marketing and outreach relating to student diversity.

The authors say that the results of the study are surprising given the widespread use of contextual admissions, which in many cases reduce the entry grade requirements for applicants from lower socio-economic neighborhoods.

Evidence-based practices

Co-author of the report, Dr. Laurence Etherington, Senior Lecturer and Admissions Tutor at York Law School, said: "Our research found many committed people working to provide equal access to 'elite' law schools. We hope that initiatives such as the Law Admissions Network can foster better evidence-based practices, improving opportunities for applicants from all backgrounds with the long-term result a profession that is more representative of the community it serves. Here at York, we have launch a research project in response the report to look into our interview processes. We hope to identify and resolve any barriers that may be disproportionately impacting certain groups."

More information: Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds need higher A-level grades than their peers to attend top UK law schools. www.thebridgegroup.org.uk/news/admissions-to-law

Provided by University of York