

Bright but disadvantaged students are less likely to take university-favored courses

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Bright but disadvantaged students are far less likely to take the subjects favoured by Russell Group universities than their more advantaged counterparts, according Oxford University research.

It shows that only one third of bright but [disadvantaged students](#) took one or more A-level exams in what the Russell Group defines as 'facilitating [subjects](#)' such as Maths, English, the sciences, [humanities](#) or [modern languages](#), compared with 58% of their more advantaged counterparts.

The research by Professor Pam Sammons, Dr Katalin Toth and Professor Kathy Sylva, from the Oxford University Department of Education, is based on data from more than 3,000 young people tracked through school since the age of three for the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project.

It identifies how bright disadvantaged pupils can improve their chances of gaining good grades at A-level, and finds that grades are generally higher of pupils who take trips to museums and galleries, and read for pleasure. Pupils in the habit of doing daily homework were found to be nine times more

likely to gain three A-levels.

'Bright' pupils were defined as those who had obtained Level 5 (the standard expected for 14 year-olds) or higher in any of the three 'core' subjects - English, [maths](#) or science, in national assessments at the end of primary school (Year 6). Pupils classed as 'disadvantaged' were those with Free School Meal (FSM) status, or based on their families' social and economic status (based on the parents' occupations and salary).

The researchers found that only 35% of the bright disadvantaged group went on to achieve three A-levels compared with 60% of their bright advantaged peers.

Factors that made it significantly more likely that the bright disadvantaged students would attain 3 A-levels include a good quality pre-school education; supportive home learning environments from a young age, interests such as reading books and going on educational outings; an outstanding secondary school (as rated by Ofsted) and one where there were good relationships of trust between teachers and students, with regular feedback; and doing regular homework before and during their GCSEs.

Professor Pam Sammons, co-author of the report, said: 'There is no silver bullet that alone can make a difference but a combination of good schools and pre-schools, the right home learning environment and supportive teachers ready to monitor progress and provide good feedback can all ensure that bright but disadvantaged students get the chance of a good university education. There are important lessons here for teachers and policymakers seeking to reduce the equity gap in attainment.'

The report suggests that enrichment vouchers, perhaps funded through the pupil premium, should be made available to encourage reading for pleasure, educational trips and out-of-school study

for high achievers. Schools should also provide more opportunities for able students to undertake academic enrichment activities where these are not available at home, including through structured 'gifted and talented' programmes, and monitor their progress more effectively, says the research funded by the Sutton Trust. It adds that students should also encourage them on the best subject choices, particularly for leading universities.

Provided by Oxford University

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