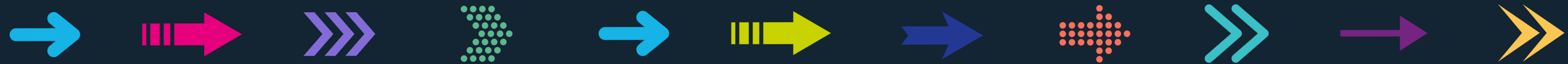


"THE MISSING MIDDLE": PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AT LEVELS 4 AND 5



PHILIPPA ALWAY, UCAS

GINNY PAGE, GATSBY FOUNDATION

LOUISE WYLIE, UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

Ginny Page

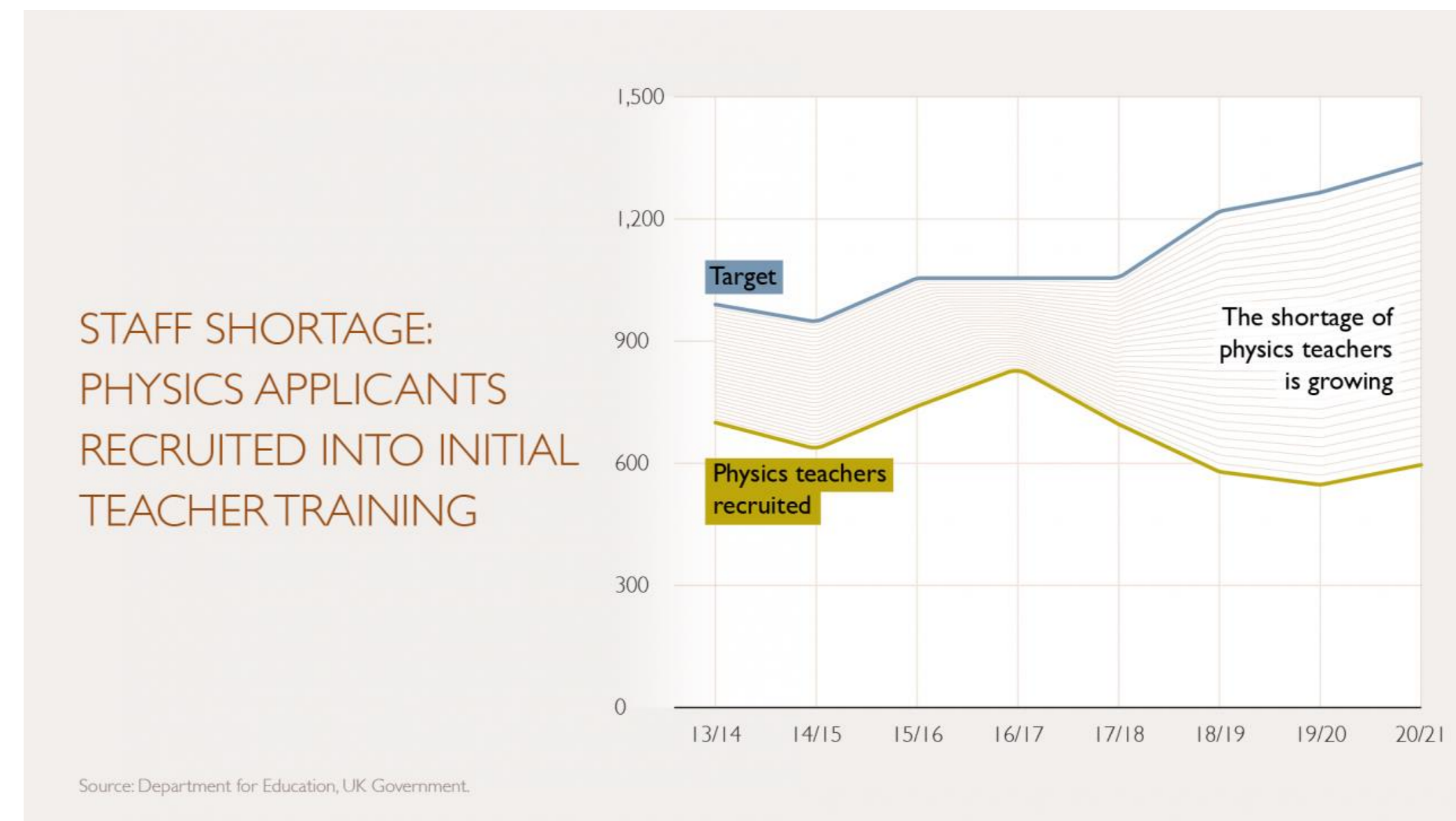
Director of Programmes, Education
Gatsby Foundation

About the Gatsby Foundation

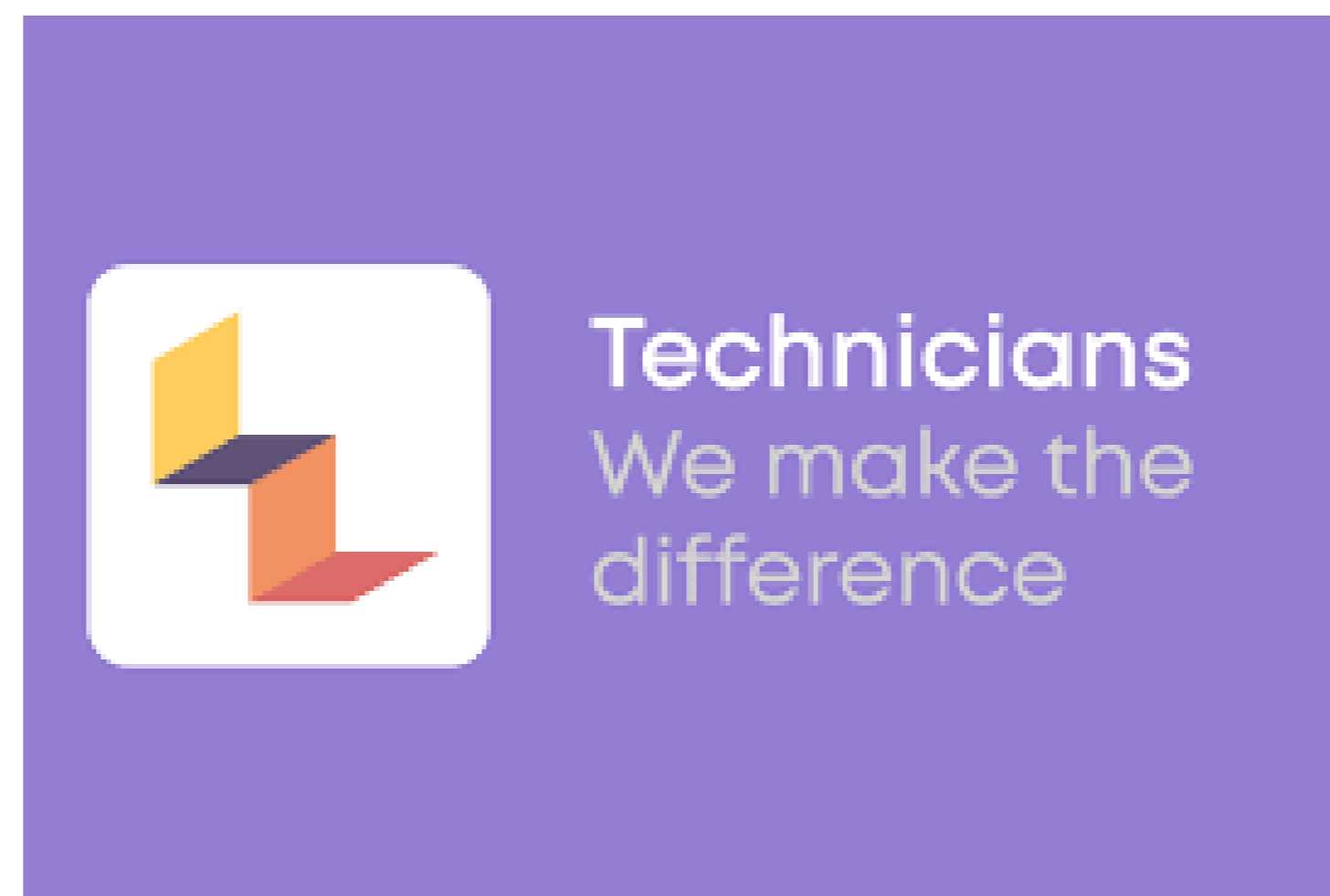


- David Sainsbury's charitable foundation
- Established in 1967
- Active in:
 - Plant Science
 - Neuroscience
 - Public Policy
 - Arts
 - East Africa
 - Education

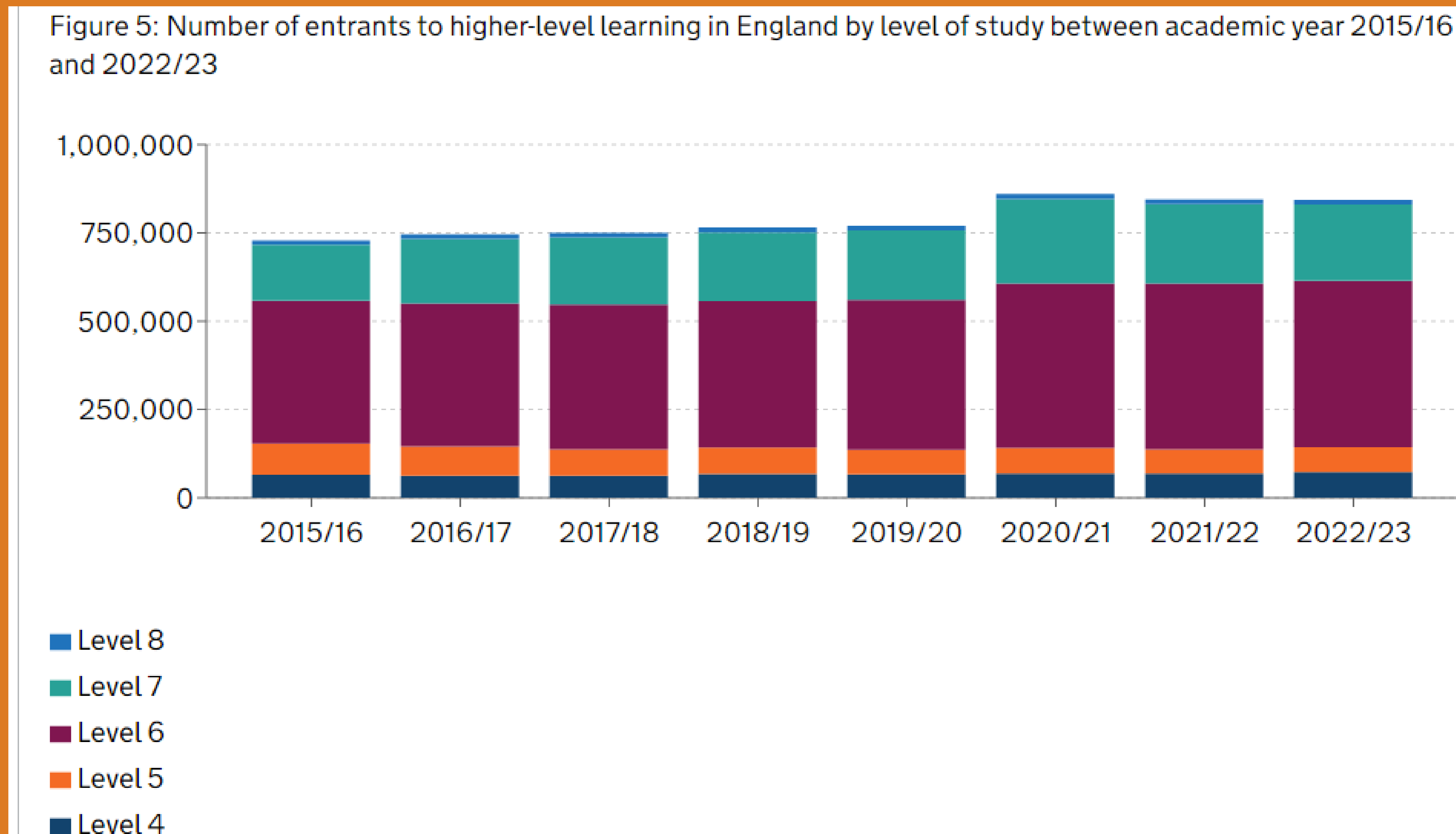
THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS GOOD CAREER GUIDANCE



THE MISSING MIDDLE:
HIGHER TECHNICAL EDUCATION
IN ENGLAND

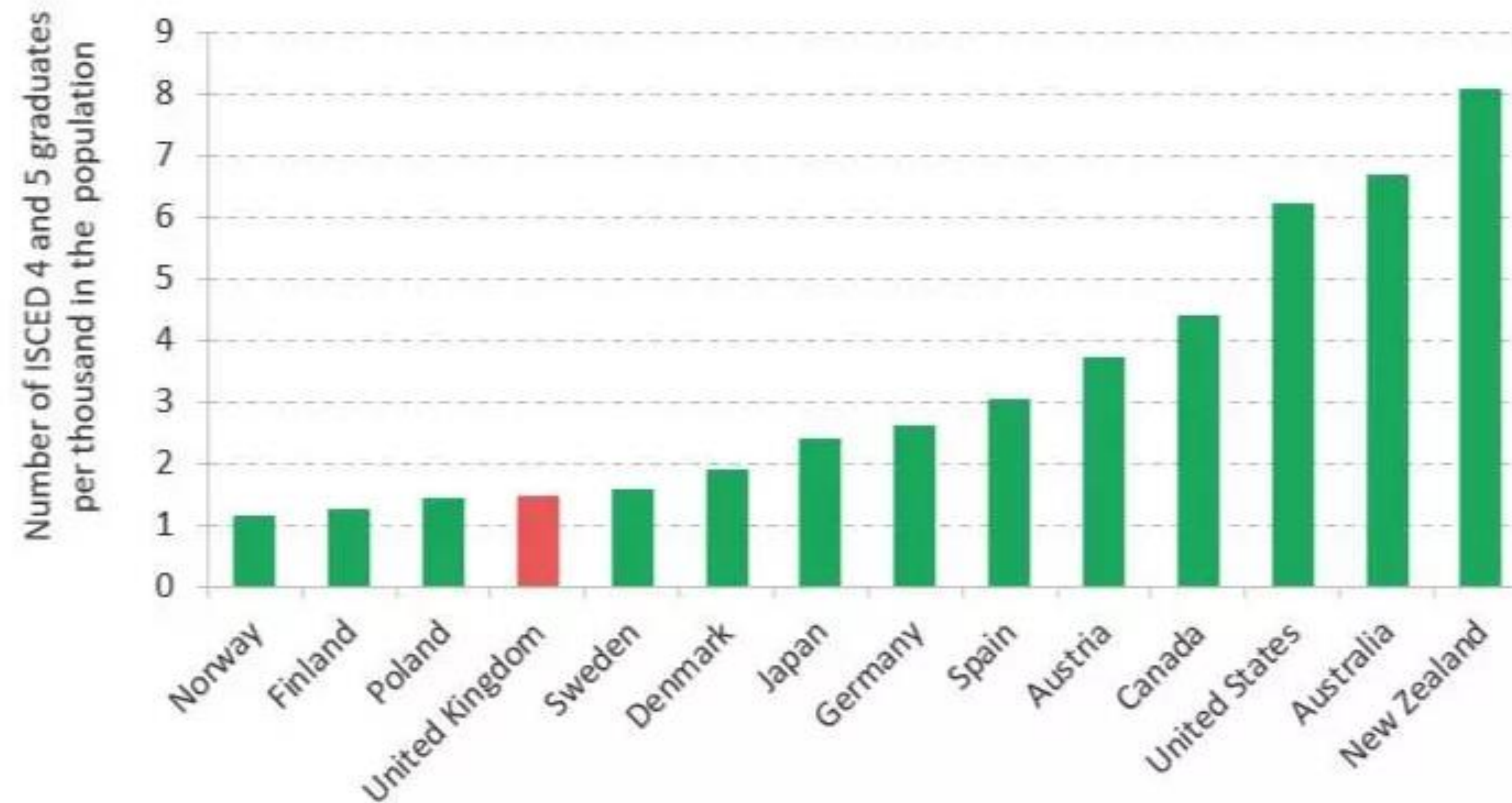


Level 4 and 5 education is the 'Missing Middle' between Level 3 and Level 6 in England (Department for Education)



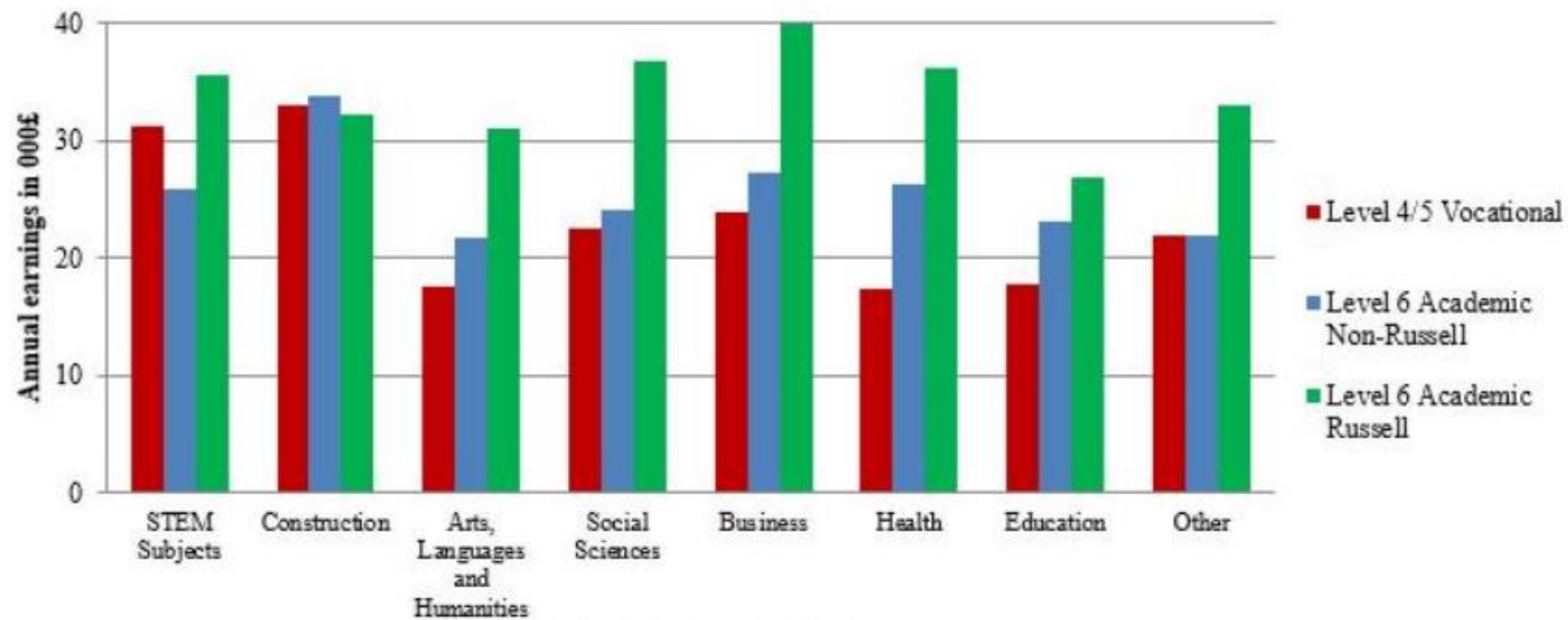
The proportion of people getting Level 4 and 5 in the UK is lower than most other developed countries (Institute for Fiscal Studies)

Number of first-time graduates from ISCED Level 4 and 5 programmes per thousand in the population



Graduates of STEM and Construction Level 4 and 5 qualifications can earn more than degree graduates, even from Russell Group universities (Centre for Vocational Education Research, LSE)

Figure 4: Median annual earnings* at age 30, KS4 cohort of 2002/03



* in £ at 2015 price levels

HTQs can be a quicker route into important and valuable careers (Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education) as well as further study.



The screenshot displays the IfATE Occupational Maps interface. At the top, the logo reads "IfATE Occupational maps" with the tagline "Shaping skills training". Navigation links for "Glossary", "Account", and "Search" are visible. A blue banner indicates "PUBLIC BETA" and "This service is currently in public beta".

Below the banner, a "Filters" section includes dropdown menus for "Technical education", "Levels", "Occupational standard status", "Careers-led", and "Green". Action buttons for "Expand", "Collapse", "Change display", "Share", "Export to CSV", and "Print to PDF" are also present.

The main content area is divided into three columns: "Technical Occupations Levels 2-3", "Higher Technical Occupations Levels 4-5", and "Professional Occupations Levels 6-7". A red diamond icon on the left indicates the "Digital" category is selected, with a sub-menu for "Digital Support and Services".

The "Digital Support and Services" section is organized into three columns:

- IT support and services technician:**
 - Cyber security technician (Level 3, HTQ, TL)
 - Digital device repair technician (Level 3, A)
 - Digital support technician - Digital Applications Technician (DAT) (Level 3, HTQ, TL)
 - Digital support technician - Digital Service
- Cyber security technician:**
 - Cyber security technologist - Cyber Defend & Respond (Level 4, HTQ)
 - Cyber security technologist - Cyber Risk Analyst (Level 4, HTQ)
 - Cyber security technologist - Cyber Security Engineer (Level 4, HTQ)
- Cyber security professional:**
 - Cyber security technical professional (Level 6, A)

What can you do with an HTQ? Some examples (IFATE)

Adult care manager

Youth justice practitioner

Nursing associate

Technician scientist

Sports coach

Senior chef

Countryside ranger

Space engineering technician

Construction site supervisor

Audiovisual technician

Marketing executive

Payroll assistant manager

Corporate responsibility and sustainability practitioner

Cyber security technologist

How do you and your students know where to find a good Level 4 and 5 qualification? (UCAS)



“HTQs are technical qualifications that have been developed by employers and awarding bodies, so you’ll get the right training, knowledge, and skills to succeed in the workplace.

They are based on the same set of standards as apprenticeships and T Levels and have been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education as meeting the occupational standards for the relevant sector.

There are many different types of HTQs, such as:

- higher national diplomas
- higher national certificates
- foundation degrees
- higher education diplomas”

254 HTQ courses from 68 providers are currently listed on UCAS.

But more than 263 qualifications have been approved as HTQs with more than 1500 courses available around England, including Further Education Colleges.

A bit of mythbusting (DFE)

- Why do we need lots of new qualifications?
 - Many Level 4 and 5 qualifications have been around for years – the title ‘Higher Technical Qualification’ is an extra quality assurance introduced in 2020, like professional body accreditation.
- Can students get loans for these courses?
 - Yes, full-time and part-time students on HTQs that are at least one year will be able to apply for tuition fee and maintenance loans in exactly the same way as for degree courses.
- Can students progress to a degree from a Level 4 or 5 qualification?
 - Level 4 and 5 qualifications are considered equivalent to the first year(s) of a degree, and it is often possible to ‘top up’ to a degree if wanted. Students can ask providers about this when researching options.
- Do these qualifications cost the same as degrees?
 - They cost less because they are shorter – Level 4 qualifications are typically one year and Level 5 qualifications typically 2 years. But many Further Education Colleges run these courses and they generally charge lower fees.



Key takeaway:

Anyone advising others on higher education – particularly in support of the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance - should know what this logo means.

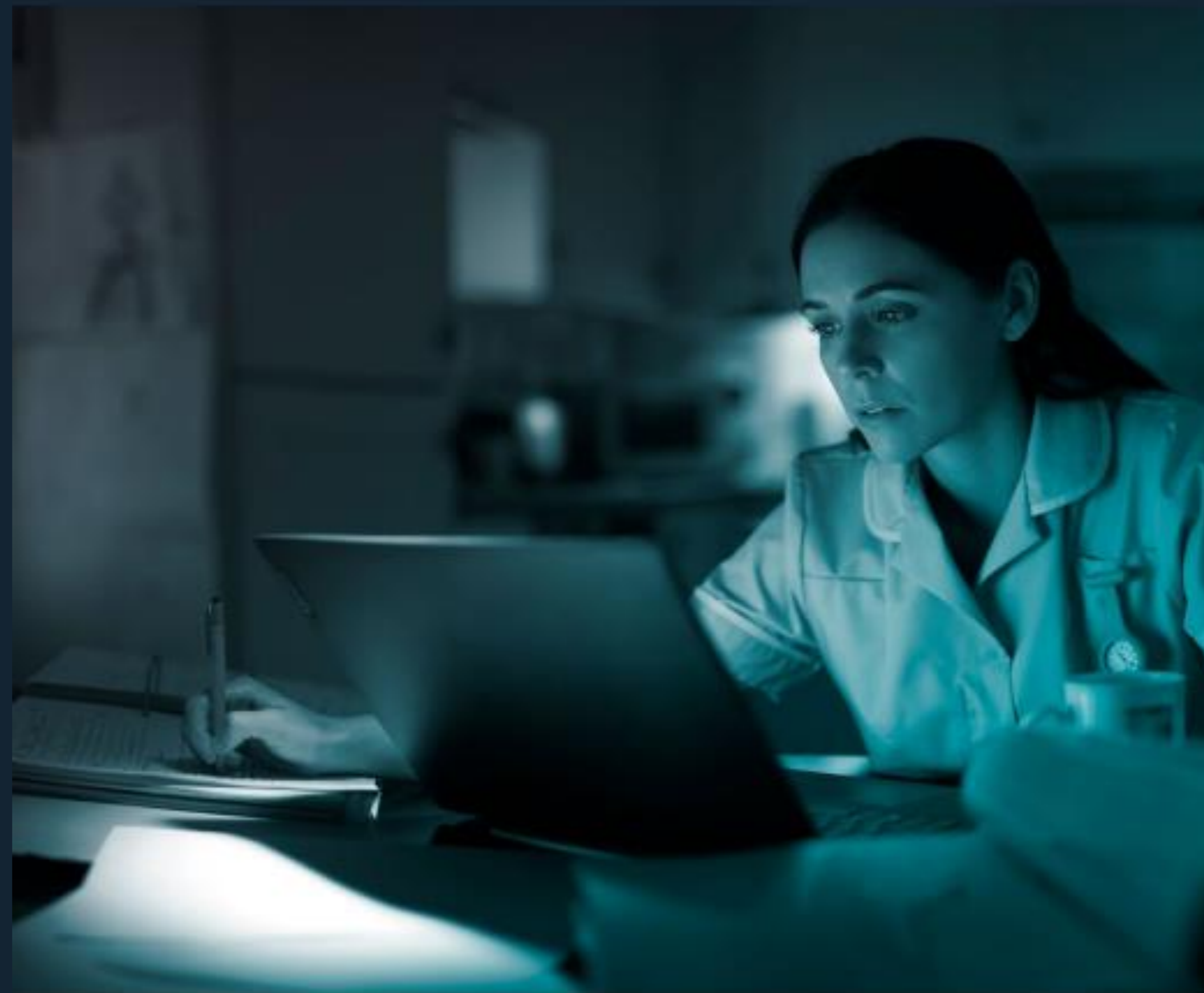
UCAS LEVEL 4 AND 5



Philippa Alway – Senior Policy Adviser (Skills, Schools and Colleges)

WHERE NEXT?

WHO APPLIES TO **LEVEL 4 AND 5** QUALIFICATIONS?



KEY TRENDS IN LEVEL 4 AND 5 (2023 CYCLE)

1

The number of **applications to Level 4 and 5 courses** has decreased by 12% from 46,725 in 2019 to 40,920 in 2023.

2

The decline is **driven by Level 5**, where applications decreased by 21% (from 37,195 in 2019 to 29,250 in 2023).

3

The most popular choice were **subjects allied to medicine**, particularly among mature applicants.

4

Applications were highest in **regions where progression to Level 6+ is lowest**.

5

The majority (79%) of applicants to Level 4 or 5 courses **also applied to a Level 6+ course**.

6

One **third (33%)** picked the **Level 4 or 5 course** over Level 6+ when they received an offer from both.

WHO ARE THE UCAS APPLICANTS FOR LEVEL 4 AND 5?

Mature applicants were more likely to apply than younger applicants

Similar proportions of males and females applied

Ethnic group trends are changing, with the White and Black ethnic groups equally likely to apply

Applicants who shared **certain disabilities** were more likely to apply than those who did not share a disability

Care-experienced applicants were more likely to apply than those without care experience



Applicants from **disadvantaged areas** were more likely to apply than those from the least disadvantaged areas

Applicants whose **parent/guardian did not attend HE** were more likely to apply than those whose parent/guardian did

Applicants were more likely to **stay in the region they live** in than Level 6+ applicants

Those with **VTQs and from FE colleges** were more likely to apply than applicants with other qualifications and schools/colleges

Applicants of all ages **were more likely to apply independently**, compared to Level 6+

WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF APPLICANTS?



Discovery

Awareness in last 12 months



Application

Asking for clearer explanations of different types of quals and support in navigating student finance (notably for mature)



Exploration

Considering other options including apprenticeships (over a third) and full-time work (almost half)



Future

Half work focused

1 in 5 wanting to progress in HE

LOW AWARENESS OF HTQs?

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents were unfamiliar with the term Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

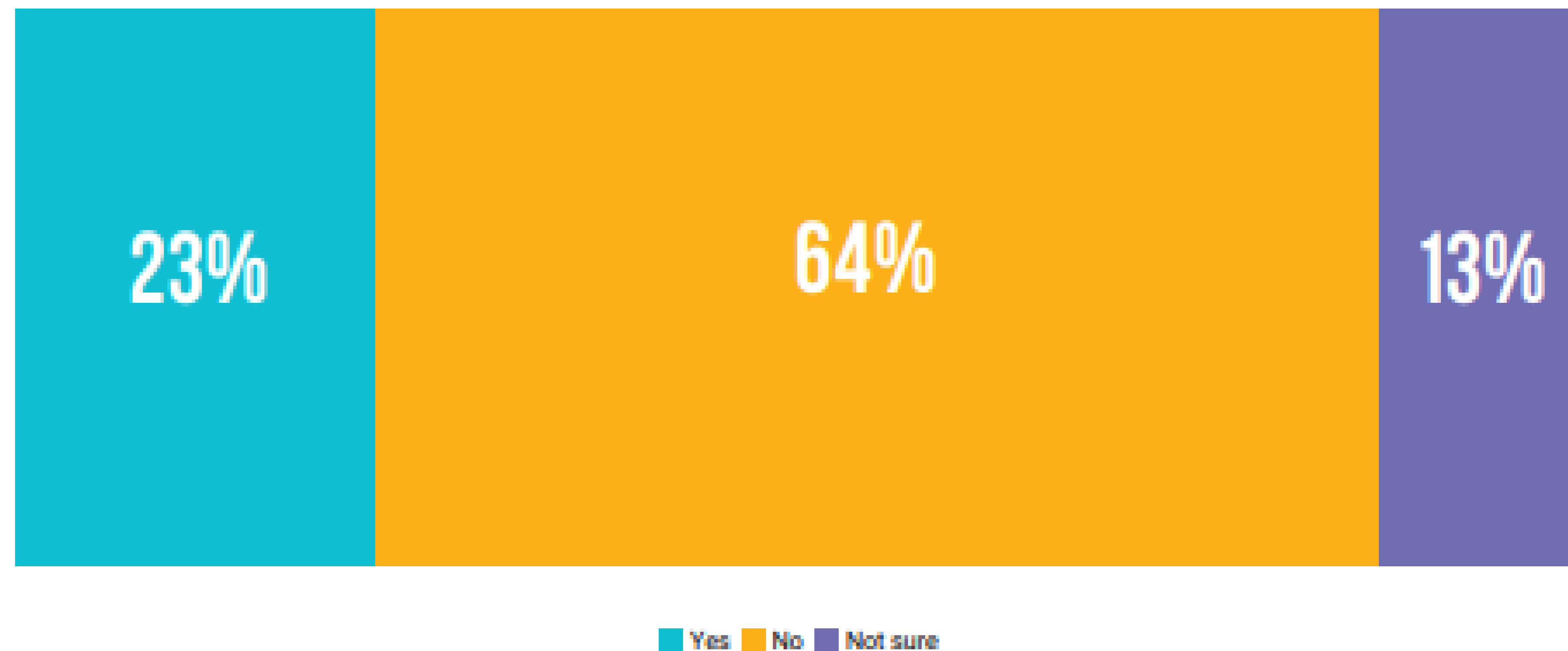


Figure 18: Q. Have you heard of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)? (935 respondents, weighted)

WHAT DO THEY KNOW ABOUT HTQS?

27% understood that they had been developed in conjunction with employers

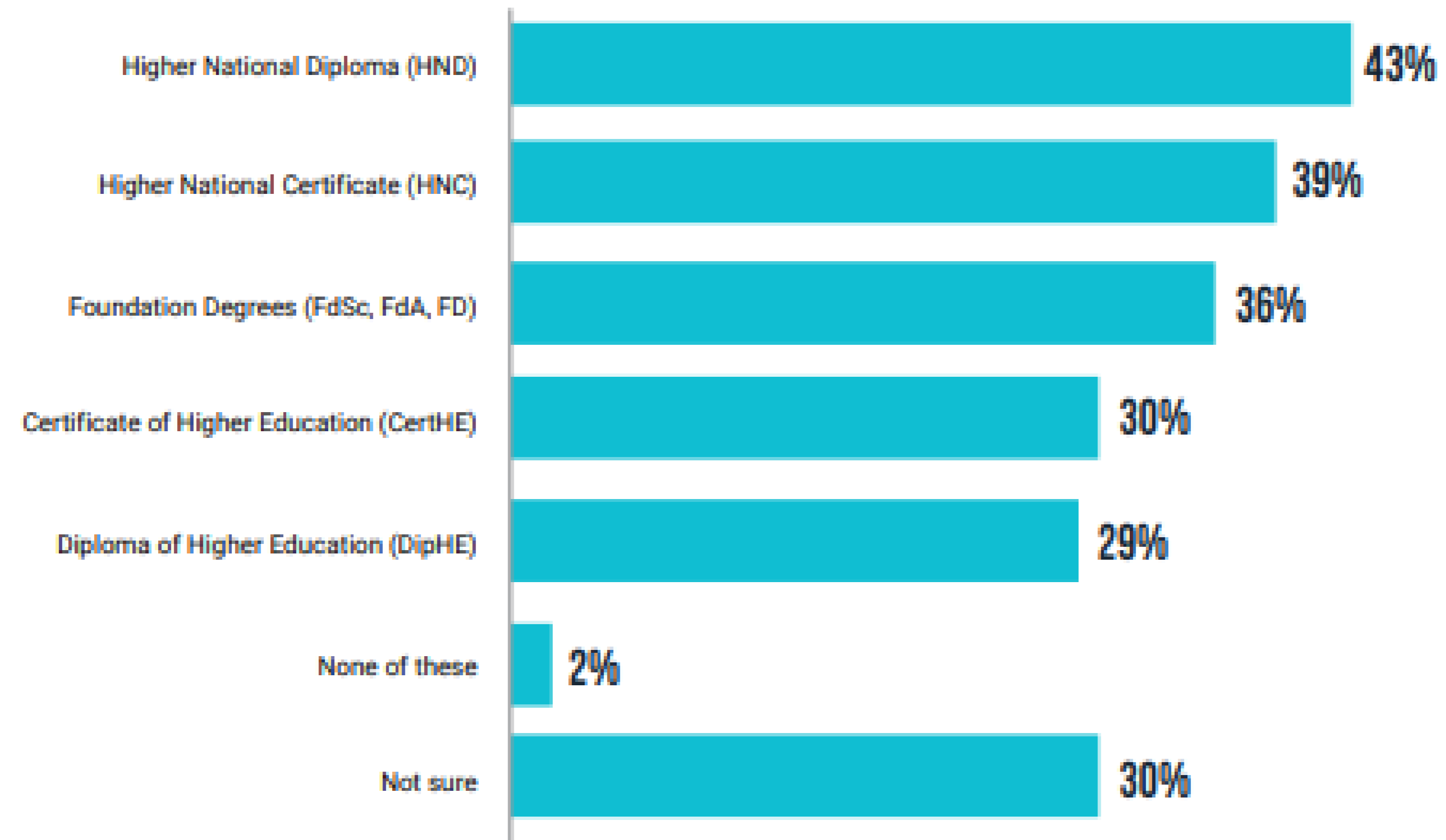
50% correctly identifying that they had been approved by IfATE

25% correctly said they thought HTQs were currently only available in a limited number of subjects

25% of this group didn't know any features of an HTQ

WHICH QUALS CAN BE HTQS?

Respondents were most likely to think that HTQs could be HNDs (43%), HNCs (39%) or foundation degrees (36%). Almost a third of respondents were unsure which types of courses could be approved as HTQs



UCAS COMMITMENTS



Build on existing content (both digitally and at events) to offer enhanced information, advice and guidance



Continue to **support HE providers** currently using UCAS for admissions, and new providers looking to use UCAS in the future, to reach potential applicants



Support teachers and advisers, charity partners and influencers (e.g. parents/ carers), with insights on Level 4 and 5 applicants



Share relevant data insight and explore how insights can be used in collaborative work with key sectors and employers

HTQS IN SEARCH

The image shows a screenshot of the UCAS search interface on the left and a map of the United Kingdom on the right. The search filters include:

- Course type and year:** Undergraduate, Postgraduate, 2023-2024, 2024-2025, 2025-2026.
- Start month:** Aug 2024, Sep 2024, Oct 2024, Nov 2024, Dec 2024, Jan 2025, Feb 2025, Mar 2025, Apr 2025, May 2025, Jun 2025, Jul 2025.
- Study mode:** Full-time, Accelerated, Part-time/flexible, Distance learning, Degree Apprenticeship.
- Qualification type:** HNC or Cert HE, HND or Dip HE, Bachelor's, Masters, PG Certificate or Diploma, Higher Technical Qualifications, Other qualifications.

The map on the right shows the United Kingdom with numerous red location pins indicating the presence of Higher Technical Qualifications across various regions, including London, the Midlands, the South East, and Wales.

This Higher Technical Qualification is approved against occupational standards decided by employers. [Learn more about Higher Technical Qualifications.](#)

INFORMATION, ADVICE & GUIDANCE

Home / Undergraduate / What and where to study / Study options

HIGHER TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

Explore this section

Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are now available in Digital, Construction and Health & Science with more sectors coming in September 2024. Find out what they are, who they're for, and what and where you can study.

Who are Higher Technical Qualifications for?

- They're for students over 18 who want to study a subject to prepare them for skilled jobs, and also for adults looking to retrain or upskill
- They would suit you if you want a more practical, employer-led programme
- Although Higher Technical Qualifications are primarily designed for entry into skilled employment or those looking to retrain or upskill, you could also progress to further study and/or training.

What's on this page?

- What are Higher Technical Qualifications? (HTQs)
- Who are Higher Technical Qualifications for?
- Where can I study a Higher Technical Qualification?
- Why take a Higher Technical Qualification?
- What subjects are available?
- How do I find a course?

Higher Technical Qualifications

Copy link

high-skilled, highly paid jobs in a wide range of sectors

Watch on YouTube

KEY TAKEAWAY

UCAS insights and teams are here to support to support applicants in discovering and understanding all higher education options.



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Louise Wylie

Student Recruitment Officer

Higher Technical Courses and Apprenticeships

The general picture at Salford



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

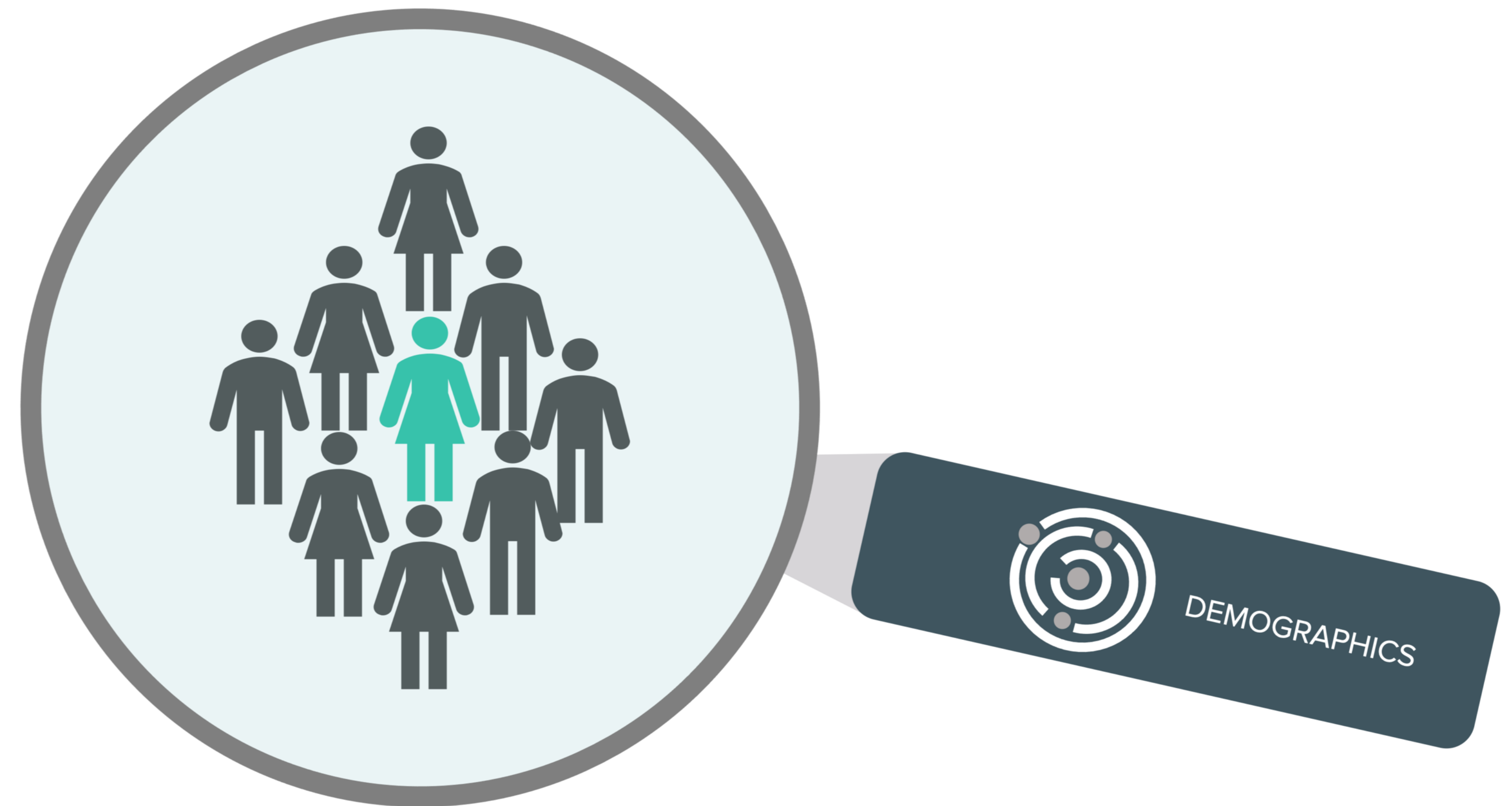
- Royal Charter University
- 28,000 students
- 84% of undergraduates are from a widening participation background
- Expanding in degree/higher apprenticeships and higher technical courses
- Partner in the Greater Manchester Institute of Technology



L4/L5 demographics



- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Region
- POLAR
- Level 3 qualifications



Case studies



University of
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FdSc Nursing Associate



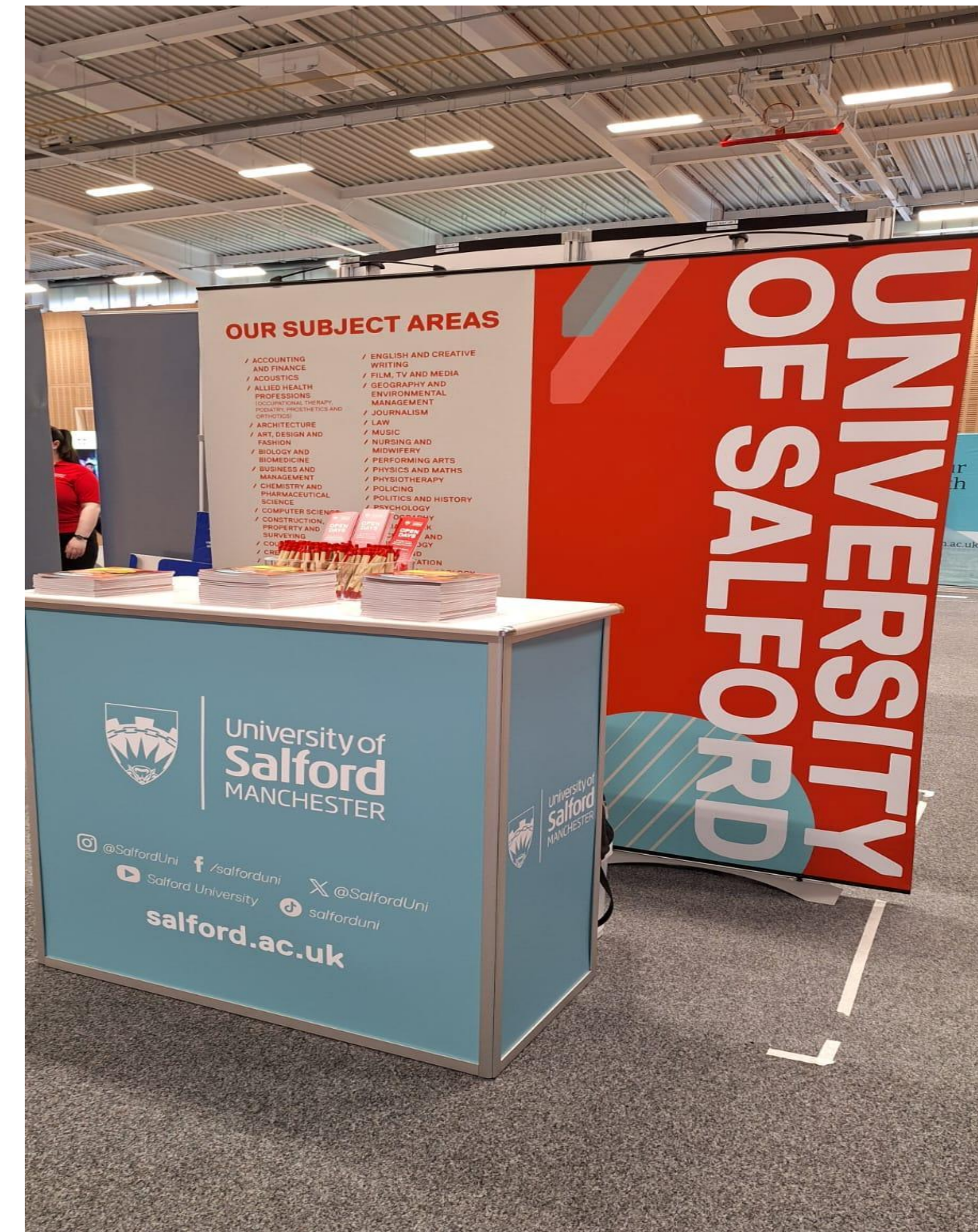
HND Esports Management



How is recruitment different at L4/L5?



- Application cycle is different (equal consideration deadline)
- Recruitment cycle is different (events)
- Student experience is varied
- Finance
- Accommodation





It is vital that students know the range of options available to them. If they do not know, they cannot make an informed choice.



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QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

