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## **The Number of Ethnic Minority Students in British Higher Education: some grounds for optimism**

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TARIQ MODOOD

### INTRODUCTION

I came to the topic of ethnic minority entry into higher education with a number of contradictory impressions. Living for the last decade in the university city of Oxford and being involved with some South Asian student societies in the university, I had a distinct impression that I was seeing the numbers of British Asians (as opposed to overseas students), especially Indians (amongst whom I include East African Asians) grow at a significant rate and to a point where they reflected their proportion in the British population. Yet, I was also aware that relatively few Asians, especially Pakistanis and Bangladeshi, were achieving examination success in Oxford city schools or going on into higher education. Towards the end of the decade, working at the Commission for Racial Equality, I came across evidence that among employers many of the largest graduate recruiters were not recruiting ethnic minority graduates in proportion to their numbers in the population, and were justifying the shortfall by saying that 'there were not enough ethnic minority graduates to go round'. I was also aware of the concern that existed in connection with Afro-Caribbean 'underachievement' in school examinations (Rampton Report, 1981), a phenomenon that was sometimes generalised to all non-white groups (especially if or because they were held to be 'black').

As I began to look into this topic I discovered that there was very little hard evidence and that the field was itself structured by these contradictory perceptions. On the one hand there was evidence, stretching back a number of years, that some Asian groups were doing very well in winning university places (Vellins, 1982; Ballard & Vellins, 1985); evidence which was given some support by the research over several years into O level and GCSE performance in Inner London Education Authority schools which consistently showed that students of all ethnic minority groups except Afro-Caribbean were outperforming white students, sometimes massively so (ILEA Research and Statistics, 1987; Nuttall *et al.*, 1992). This seemed wholly counter to experience in various other parts of the country, including Oxford [1]. Yet wider national studies showed that while whites were doing much better than in ILEA, they were still not doing quite as well as Asians in these examinations (Drew & Gray, 1990). One wondered whether the category 'Asian' encompassed too much diversity and was obscuring the poor performance of significant and identifiable sections of the Asian community. Other researchers, worried by the too-easy and false generalisations that were being made about South Asians, instead of penetrating beyond aggregate 'Asian' figures and enquiring into which Asian groups were 'over-' and 'under-' represented in higher education, dismissed the idea of Asian high academic achieve-

ment levels as a 'myth', arguing not only that many Asians were not achieving those levels but those that were, were taking longer to do so, having to work harder and receiving inadequate support at school (Tanna, 1990). Arguments such as these, allied with broader concerns about racial equality in the education system, tended to reinforce the view that ethnic minorities were under-represented in higher education and needed special programmes of access. Thus, for example, in 1989, the Training Agency (later part of the Department of Employment) agreed to fund a Bristol Polytechnic 18-month project on widening access to higher education for ethnic minorities (Bird *et al.*, 1992). As late as autumn 1990, Raminder Singh, a Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality and a specialist on ethnic minorities and higher education, published a research paper, a key conclusion of which was that 'the participation rate in higher education of ethnic minorities in general and Afro-Caribbeans in particular is relatively low' (Commission for Racial Equality, 1991) [2]. Indeed, the strength of this perception is evidenced in that, several weeks after contrary data had been published in the press, Peter Scott, the editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, now a Professor of Education, was able to write that ethnic minorities were 'conspicuous on campus by their absence' (editorial, 5 July 1991), and a 1992 Open University course reader stated that 'such evidence that does exist suggests that minority ethnic group students... were significantly under-represented at degree level' (Skellington & Morris, 1992, p. 127), even though the Labour Force Survey clearly showed that by the late 1980s ethnic minority young people taken as a whole were over-represented at degree level (Jones, 1993, p. 49).

The only way, the last examples notwithstanding, these contradictory perceptions could be resolved was by the creation of hard data. Hence, the decision of UCCA and PCAS to ask candidates from 1990 onwards to specify their ethnic origin was most welcome. For while it would inevitably open up many questions surrounding the admissions process, it would at least resolve the uncertainty about the size of differential participation rates. It is worth stressing that the factual question of representation of various population groups in higher education is a fairly narrow question. Indeed, probably the single factor that led to this data collection was the Commission for Racial Equality's findings of racial discrimination in the admissions process at St George's Medical School, University of London and the prospect of there being further public investigations if the higher education system showed no sign that it was looking into the possibility of racial discrimination (Commission for Racial Equality, 1988). The important point about the CRE's findings was not the issue of under-representation (Asians and 'Orientals' were over-represented and Afro-Caribbeans were not under-represented on the basis of the national population) but the fact of bias in the selection against 'non-Caucasian' candidates. So, though the data collected by UCCA and PCAS over the last two years open more questions than they close, and it is important in terms of racial equality and multiculturalism to recognise this, nevertheless it does enable us to answer some factual questions about which even expert opinion has been divided. While the distinction between universities and polytechnics, between UCCA and PCAS, was abolished in 1992 it was in place during 1990 and 1991 when the data were collected and I shall therefore use the pre-1992 distinctions throughout.

## REPRESENTATION

UCCA and PCAS have now been able to publish data on the ethnic origins of

applicants and those admitted for 1990 and 1991. As the 1991 data on ethnic composition have almost the same contours, despite substantial increases in total numbers, as that of 1990, I present them as a compound.

The ethnic origin categories which applicants were asked to choose among were those researched by OPCS for use in the 1991 Census. A small number of applicants, less than 3%, failed to state their ethnic origins. Additionally, about 7.5% of entrants to PCAS institutions were direct entrants who did not go through PCAS and, therefore, their ethnic origins are not known to PCAS (they are known to those individual polytechnics and colleges which have their own ethnic monitoring systems). It is unlikely, however, that ethnic minorities are under-represented in these two sets. In respect of the former, my personal experience is that ethnic minority individuals are no less or not much less reluctant to answer ethnic origin questions than white people; of the latter, direct entrants consist primarily of local candidates, especially via various access schemes, and enquiries to several polytechnics have established that ethnic minorities are over- rather than under-represented in this set. I have estimated a level of representation of various groups by using the 1991 Census data for 15–24 year olds: the age reference being particularly important as the minority groups, though not all to the same degree, are skewed towards younger age groups compared to the white population [3]. Not only is the Census the natural choice of a benchmark, but now that the Census data are available it can be seen that the Labour Force Survey (LFS) has been under-estimating most non-white groups, especially the Africans, other Blacks and Bangladeshis, so that earlier estimates of levels of representation of these groups which use the LFS as a benchmark generate overly optimistic conclusions (including an earlier draft of this article) [4].

Even with these limitations to accuracy in mind, Table I shows fairly unambiguously that taking ethnic minorities as a whole, far from there being an under-representation, they enjoy a representation at twice their population size in applications and somewhat better in admissions. Yet as the table clearly shows, this is an extremely misleading generalisation, for the critical fact about ethnic minorities is the diversity in their levels of representation. For while Africans have a representation at more than three times their size, Indians and 'Other Asians' (primarily East African Asians, one supposes) at about two and a half times their size, the Chinese at somewhat more than twice and Pakistanis at somewhat less than twice, the Black Caribbeans have an over-representation of about 50% which is mainly based on the performance of the women, and though Caribbean men are probably not under-represented, the 'Black Other' group (people of Caribbean descent who prefer the label 'Black British' to a Caribbean tag?) does have an under-representation. At -14% this is not much worse than the white under-representation of -9%. The only minority group that is significantly under-represented in PCAS admissions and, especially in applications, is the Bangladeshis, particularly women.

Is this because whites are over-represented in the university sector, while ethnic minorities are ghettoised into the 'second-class' sector? Whites do have a larger share of university than polytechnic and public sector college admissions (around 90%, compared to less than 85%), but this is still an under-representation. While ethnic minorities form nearly 8% of UCCA admissions in the years 1990 and 1991 (and so there is no ethnic minority under-representation as such), nevertheless, there are proportionately fewer applications to UCCA than to PCAS for each minority group, and in total the minorities are in the universities in only half the proportion they are in the other sector (Table II). Moreover, as regards specific groups, Pakistanis join

TABLE I. *Analysis of Home Applicants\* and Admissions to British Polytechnics and Public Sector Colleges by Ethnic Origin, 1990 and 1991*

	Men	Women	Total	% of 15-24-yr-olds in Britain**	Level of representation in comparison to population size (%)
<i>A. Applicants (Table J1, PCAS)</i>					
Asian Bangladeshi	796 (0.2%)	480 (0.1%)	1,276 (0.35%)	0.49	-29
Asian-Chinese	1,542 (0.4%)	1,564 (0.4%)	3,106 (0.85%)	0.42	+102
Asian-Indian	8,829 (2.4%)	7,589 (2.1%)	16,418 (4.47%)	2.13	+109
Asian-Pakistani	5,163 (1.4%)	2,854 (0.8%)	8,017 (2.18%)	1.35	+61
Asian-other	2,240 (0.6%)	1,670 (0.5%)	3,910 (1.06%)	0.47	+125
Black-African	3,513 (0.9%)	2,842 (0.8%)	6,355 (1.73%)	0.57	+229
Black-Caribbean	2,179 (0.6%)	3,823 (1.0%)	6,002 (1.64%)	1.22	+34
Black-other	694 (0.2%)	1,088 (0.3%)	1,782 (0.49%)	0.56	-12
White	158,737 (43.5%)	155,898 (42.5%)	314,635 (85.7%)	92.8	-8
Other	2,651 (0.7%)	2,742 (0.7%)	5,393 (1.47%)	—	—
Total	186,344 (50.8%)	180,610 (49.2%)	366,954	—	—
Total ethnic minority	27,607 (7.5%)	24,712 (6.7%)	52,319 (14.3%)	7.2	+96
<i>B. Admissions (Table J3, PCAS)</i>					
Asian-Bangladeshi	374 (0.3%)	171 (0.1%)	545 (0.37%)	0.49	-24
Asian-Chinese	633 (0.4%)	697 (0.5%)	1,330 (0.91%)	0.42	+117
Asian-Indian	4,197 (2.9%)	3,458 (2.4%)	7,655 (5.23%)	2.13	+146
Asian-Pakistani	2,428 (1.7%)	1,126 (0.8%)	3,554 (2.43%)	1.35	+80
Asian-other	949 (0.6%)	652 (0.4%)	1,601 (1.13%)	0.47	+140
Black-African	1,475 (1.0%)	1,128 (0.8%)	2,603 (1.78%)	0.57	+212
Black-Caribbean	1,080 (0.7%)	1,651 (1.1%)	2,731 (1.87%)	1.22	+53
Black-other	282 (0.2%)	425 (0.3%)	707 (0.48%)	0.56	-14
White	68,867 (47.3%)	54,514 (37.3%)	123,381 (84.34%)	92.8	-9
Other	1,160 (0.8%)	1,026 (0.7%)	2,186 (1.45%)	—	—
Total	81,445 (55.7%)	64,848 (44.3%)	146,293	—	—
Total ethnic minority	12,578 (8.8%)	10,334 (7.1%)	22,912 (15.66%)	7.2	+118

\* 'Home Applicants' are those who are domiciled or have permanent residence in the UK. They do not, for instance, include overseas students who may have studied for A levels in the UK before applying for a course in higher education.

\*\* Source: 1991 Census.

Bangladeshis in under-representation, albeit not to the same degree, though again the position of women may be worse than men, and the composite blacks suffer a significant under-representation in admissions and applications. In fact the 'black' group is even more internally diverse than the 'Asian', and it is therefore most helpful that in 1991 UCCA analysed the 'black' group into the constituent parts used by OPCS in the 1991 Census. The extra analysis of Table III shows that Africans, as in the case of PCAS, enjoy one of the highest levels of representation of all minority groups in applications though they have only a bit better than equal representation in admissions. The corollary of this is that the severe under-representation of Afro-Caribbeans is greater than the holistic 'black' figure suggested; and amongst Afro-Caribbeans, while UCCA does not offer data linking ethnicity and gender, one can guess that the position of men is worse, perhaps severely worse, than that of women.

TABLE II. *Analysis of home applicants and admissions to British universities by ethnic origin, 1990 and 1991*

		(%)	% of 15-24-yr-olds in Britain	Level of representation in comparison to population size (%)
<i>A. Applicants (from Table 11A, UCCA)</i>				
Asian-Bangladeshi	1,207	0.30	0.49	-39
Asian-Chinese	3,056	0.76	0.42	+81
Asian-Indian	12,785	3.19	2.13	+50
Asian-Pakistani	6,420	1.60	1.35	+19
Asian-other	4,051	1.0	0.47	+113
Black	8,014	2.00	2.35	-37
White	348,943	87.01	92.8	-6
Other	5,581	1.39	—	—
Not known	10,967	2.73	—	—
Total applicants	401,028			
Total ethnic minority	41,118	10.25	7.2	+42
<i>B. Admissions (from Table 11B, UCCA)</i>				
Asian-Bangladeshi	483	0.23	0.49	-53
Asian-Chinese	1,482	0.72	0.42	+71
Asian-Indian	5,336	2.60	2.13	+22
Asian-Pakistani	2,256	1.09	1.35	-19
Asian-other	1,861	0.90	0.47	+91
Black	2,269	1.10	2.35	-53
White	184,837	89.68	92.8	-3
Other	2,497	1.21	—	—
Not known	5,073	2.46	—	—
Total acceptances	206,094	—	—	—
Total ethnic minority	16,184	7.85	7.2	+9

The fact that, unlike with PCAS, with UCCA the proportion of ethnic minorities decreases between applications and admissions raises the important question of bias in selection. Indeed, it would be fair to say that UCCA and PCAS data in some ways clarify aspects of the various contradictory pre-data perceptions. On the one hand, the

TABLE III. *Black home applicants and admissions to British universities, 1991*

		(%)	% of 15-24-yr-olds in Britain	Level of representation (%)
<i>A. Applicants (from Table 11A, UCCA)</i>				
Black-African	2,195	1.06	0.57	+86
Black-Caribbean	1,578	0.76	1.22	-38
Black-other	632	0.30	0.56	-46
<i>B. Admissions (from Table 11B, UCCA)</i>				
Black-African	630	0.60	0.57	+5
Black-Caribbean	459	0.43	1.22	-65
Black-other	217	0.20	0.56	-64

ethnic minority numbers and representation is greater for nearly all groups, including those entering university, than most people would have guessed (no doubt in large part assisted by the recent expansion of the system) and the diversity between them is such that it is not obvious what generalisations can be sustained about race and education in Britain. On the other hand, at least *prima facie* support for the view that ethnic minorities are concentrated in the less desirable institutions, experience unfavourable bias in selection for admission to universities (though not in the other sector; possibly the reverse) and that those groups who have been the most cause for concern, Afro-Caribbean men and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, turn out to be, while not representative of ethnic minorities as such, a genuine cause of concern. I shall present the figures of differential selection rates in the next section, and here will briefly consider whether ethnic minorities are concentrated in the less prestigious institutions.

TABLE IV. *Degree course admissions to polytechnics, 1990 (source: PCAS)*

Polytechnic/college	Total no.*	White (%)	Black (%)	Asian (%)	Other (%)	Ethnic min (%)
London: Polytechnic of Central London	1157	56.90	12.80	24.11	6.13	43.04
London: South Bank Polytechnic	1037	57.50	20.83	17.76	3.96	42.55
Polytechnic of East London	1068	59.70	15.81	22.96	1.50	40.27
London: North London Polytechnic	728	60.20	14.84	20.87	4.13	39.84
London: City of London Polytechnic	1167	60.20	14.21	21.43	4.20	39.84
Ealing College of Higher Education	654	69.70	7.95	18.96	3.36	30.27
London: Thames Polytechnic	1332	70.30	10.23	17.26	2.18	29.67
Kingston Polytechnic	1442	74.10	5.00	19.14	1.73	25.87
Middlesex Polytechnic	1055	74.50	9.18	13.38	2.94	25.50
Leicester Polytechnic	2298	80.10	3.06	16.01	0.83	19.90
Birmingham Polytechnic	1051	80.10	4.57	14.85	0.48	19.90
Wolverhampton Polytechnic	1409	80.10	4.32	14.26	1.35	19.93
Hatfield Polytechnic	1283	82.10	3.05	13.17	1.63	17.85
Brighton Polytechnic	1007	87.80	2.20	8.26	1.69	12.15
Coventry Polytechnic	1521	88.00	2.44	8.61	0.92	11.97
Sunderland Polytechnic	1184	89.70	1.00	8.45	0.84	10.29
Manchester Polytechnic	1991	90.00	1.90	7.08	1.00	9.98

\* Total of UK domiciled admitted applicants excluding direct entrants who answered the ethnic origin question.

Table IV shows the proportion of students by ethnic origin admitted to degree courses in 1990 by those polytechnics where the proportion of ethnic minority students admitted to such courses was 10% or more. There is no obvious reason to assume that these 17 polytechnics are among the less prestigious. The table shows a very clear concentration in certain polytechnics; but it is primarily a regional concentration on London and, to a lesser extent, the Midlands, not a concentration in the lower-ranking institutions of the system. Such a concentration may possibly have some negative consequences, but it also has some positive possibilities: institutions more closely connected to and valued by local communities; more multi-racial than the average, providing a context for pioneering equal opportunities and multi-cultural initiatives which enhance diversity within the system and can be studied by others; a student mix that will positively appeal to some; institutions which can be targeted by graduate employers, and so on. In any case there seems to be the possibility that the concentration is a result of some element of positive choice, both between different polytechnics and between some polytechnics and some universities, and not simply of a rejection or anticipated rejection by more prized institutions.

TABLE V. *Home applicants and admissions to Cambridge University by ethnic origin, 1990 and 1991* (source: Cambridge University)

		(%)	UCCA average (%)
<i>A. Applicants</i>			
Asian-Bangladeshi	43	0.23	0.30
Asian-Chinese	156	0.85	0.76
Asian-Indian	470	2.56	3.19
Asian-Pakistani	132	0.72	1.60
Asian-other	191	1.04	1.00
Black	112	0.61	2.00
White	16,673	90.90	87.01
Other	278	1.52	1.39
Not known	298	1.62	2.73
Total applicants	18,343	—	—
Total ethnic minority	1,372	7.48	10.25
<i>B. Admissions</i>			
Asian-Bangladeshi	11	0.19	0.23
Asian-Chinese	46	0.79	0.72
Asian-Indian	151	2.60	2.60
Asian-Pakistani	19	0.33	1.09
Asian-other	43	0.74	0.90
Black	17	0.29	1.10
White	5,373	92.0	89.68
Other	83	1.42	1.21
Not known	87	1.50	1.50
Total acceptances	5,830	—	—
Total ethnic minority	370	6.35	7.85

UCCA has not yet chosen to publish the data on individual universities, leaving the decision to do so to the individual universities themselves, but to date only one



university has published its statistics. Yet, as the university in question is Cambridge, they are worth looking at, for all will agree that it stands near the top of the system. Table V shows that while Cambridge attracts and admits a lower proportion of ethnic minorities than the UCCA average, this is still only 10% below the Census figure for ethnic minorities in the age group (working class under-representation is likely to be much higher). More importantly, it further underlines the diversity between minority groups. For while the Chinese, Indians and Bangladeshis do just as well as the UCCA average, the Pakistanis and black group do considerably worse. So, not only is it the case that different minority groups are represented in higher education in different proportions but it may also be the case that their distribution within the system reflects further differences and inequalities between them (this diversity is not confined to educational matters, see Jones, 1993; Modood, 1992). Concern about these issues and in particular the possibility of bias in the system against certain groups led the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to ask the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick to carry out an independent analysis of the UCCA data (Taylor, 1992). Some of this analysis includes references to unpublished UCCA data, which I shall discuss later. For the moment, the point of referring to this enquiry is that UCCA made available to it details of eight (unnamed) individual institutions. These details too show considerable variety not just between ethnic groups but also between institutions, so the profile of any one group, in terms of applications and admissions, varies between institutions, even in respect of particular subjects; and they show, that as with polytechnics, universities in areas with higher proportions of ethnic minorities attract and admit higher numbers of ethnic minorities. For example, in two of the eight universities, being in or near London, ethnic minorities formed a third of all applicants in 1990, and at one of them about 12% of admissions were Indians (Taylor, 1992, p. 36).

Subject areas and disciplines also reflect a diversity between ethnic groups. Again, it is not the case that all minority groups are ghettoised in the less prized subjects, for UCCA figures for 1991 show that ethnic minorities disproportionately applied for the two subjects which are the hardest to get into in terms of A-level scores, and under applied for the least competitive option, teacher training (Table VI).

TABLE VI. *Applications for selected subjects as a percentage of applications by ethnic group, 1991 (source: UCCA)*

Ethnic group	Medicine	Law	Teacher training
Asian	12.5	9.8	0.7
Black	6.2	15.7	2.0
White	3.2	4.5	3.3

While rates of applications do not reflect rates of admissions, for there is evidence of different rates of selection for different groups, the size of ethnic minority applications ensures that most groups are not under-represented, as evidenced by data on graduate destinations. For example, ethnic minorities constituted nearly 13% of enrolment for the Law Society's Final Examination in 1988-1989 and 1989-1990 (the students in question of course were admitted to UCCA and PCAS degree courses before ethnic origin data were recorded) (Law Society, 1990; I have excluded from the calculation

those whose ethnic origin is not known). And, similarly, a recent study explained its counter-intuitive finding that in at least the first few years after graduation ethnic minority graduates have higher earnings than white graduates, by opining that ethnic minority students were more likely to study courses, such as business and applied science, which led to higher earnings. It may be that whites are now following where others have led, for PCAS data for 1991 admissions shows Business and Administration to be the most popular choice not only for all Asian groups (except for Chinese men for whom it is preceded by engineering and technology) but also for whites and African women (for whom it ties with social sciences, the most favoured option of Afro-Caribbean women, while for African men it is engineering and technology). Besides education, however, the other subjects in which ethnic minorities are relatively or absolutely under-represented include physical science, architecture, building and planning, mass communications and documentations, language and related studies, humanities and the various arts options (PCAS, 1992–1993). We see, then, once again a large degree of concentration, the explanation of which is bound to be complex, and which may or not be desirable, but which is not obviously unfavourable to the minorities; though, again, the position of the minorities is far from uniform, except perhaps in respect of there being a significant number of subjects in which all the minorities are for the moment under-represented (this under-representation, together with the differential pattern of distribution between minorities is found in the eight unamed universities, Taylor 1992, p. 30). It is perhaps also worth noting that PCAS data also shows that ethnic minorities form a greater proportion of HND than degree students, but as the absolute numbers of the former are relatively small, and as nearly all the minorities are comfortably over-represented on degree courses, this hardly amounts to a form of ghettoising.

### RATES OF SUCCESS

Perhaps the issue that will now come to the fore will not be representation but selection-bias, especially in the UCCA sector. Table VII, depicting success-rates in the PCAS in 1990 and 1991 show Afro-Caribbean men the most successful (nearly half of all applicants were admitted) and white women the least successful (only just over a third of applicants were admitted). This may of course reflect the fact that less of the former and more of the latter may have got university places instead. Nevertheless,

TABLE VII. *Success rates in PCAS, 1990 and 1991*

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total (%)
Asian-Bangladeshi	47.0	35.6	42.7
Asian-Chinese	41.0	44.6	42.8
Asian-Indian	47.5	45.6	46.6
Asian-Pakistani	47.0	39.5	43.3
Asian-other	42.4	41.7	42.2
Black-African	42.0	39.7	41.0
Black-Caribbean	49.6	43.2	45.5
Black-other	40.6	39.1	39.7
White	43.4	35.0	39.2
Other	43.8	37.4	40.5
Total	43.7	35.9	39.9

TABLE VIII. *Acceptance rates for those with A levels, 1990 (from Table 11C, UCCA)*

	Two or more A-level passes or the equivalent-points scores					5 or Fewer	Total (%)
	30-26	25-21	20-16	15-11	10-6		
Asian-Bangladeshi	98.1	74.4	67.1	50.0	31.2	10.5	46.6
Asian-Chinese	90.8	88.7	65.5	42.0	23.6	7.5	49.6
Asian-Indian	94.8	83.5	56.6	33.9	16.6	9.1	45.2
Asian-Pakistani	89.4	81.3	52.8	32.7	20.0	11.6	38.4
Asian-other	88.7	85.3	66.8	46.8	20.2	17.1	48.8
Black	85.7	77.5	55.3	30.0	18.4	9.8	30.1
White	90.1	82.8	59.2	35.0	22.0	17.1	53.3
Other	90.9	86.2	57.2	36.2	19.8	16.0	48.3
Not known	89.1	77.1	55.5	41.4	26.7	15.9	44.8
Total applicants	90.2	82.7	59.0	35.3	21.8	16.1	52.1

TABLE IX. *Acceptance rates for those with A levels, 1991 (from Table 11C, UCCA)*

	Two or more A-level passes or the equivalent-points scores					5 or Fewer	Total (%)
	30-26	25-21	20-16	15-11	10-6		
Asian-Bangladeshi	90.5	78.4	58.9	32.4	28.9	19.0	44.7
Asian-Chinese	95.0	86.8	69.8	46.9	25.4	22.2	53.4
Asian-Indian	92.0	87.8	60.9	32.8	17.3	10.3	46.3
Asian-Pakistani	91.9	83.3	58.5	38.2	19.2	12.7	40.7
Asian-other	89.5	89.2	61.4	49.3	33.8	20.5	53.3
Black-African	88.1	74.3	59.7	34.5	21.6	10.0	34.3
Black-Caribbean	90.9	76.0	45.9	32.3	16.5	12.0	28.1
Black-other	89.7	79.5	58.5	38.1	19.3	18.8	38.8
White	90.7	83.4	59.4	36.2	23.0	17.5	54.2
Other	88.0	80.5	59.5	33.2	20.6	12.2	48.2
Not known	84.2	78.5	59.1	40.7	27.3	29.2	49.6
Total applicants	90.7	82.5	59.4	36.3	22.8	17.1	53.2

with nearly all minority groups doing better than average, and whites only slightly worse than the average, the figures do not suggest that there is an issue of bias against minorities in the selection process, if admissions are a reliable guide to offers made, taking the system as a whole (the situation could be different in respect of particular institutions, faculties or department).

The situation with UCCA is, however, different. Tables VIII and IX give a breakdown of the acceptance-rates of the different groups by A-level points score, from which it is clear that there are significant differences between groups. At the top end of A-level performance, the selection rates are similar for all groups, at just over 90%, with the Chinese above the average and Africans just below it. But the overall pattern is that, with almost identical scores, Chinese and white applicants are more

likely to and the Caribbeans least likely to be admitted. Thus, in the middle of the A-level range, with applicants between 20–16 points, the average success rate is about 60%, this also being the rate for whites, while for Chinese it can be 10% higher, which can also be the case for some other Asian groups, though they are more likely to be nearer or just below the average, as are the Africans, but the Caribbeans are likely to be below the average (in 1991 they were 13% below it). At the lower end of the scale, the gap in acceptance-rates between groups is once again closer, though by no means consistent between the two years, except that blacks are towards the bottom, but so are Indians (and Pakistanis, in the 5 A-level points or less category). If these variations in success-rates where applicants have almost identical scores are not problematic enough, the overall acceptance rates show a very definite hierarchy with whites at the top, closely followed by the Chinese, with the Indians and Bangladeshis 5–10% below, Pakistanis about 15%, Africans around 20% below and Caribbeans 25% below. As the overall white acceptance rate was not much over 50%, this means that only about half as many Caribbean applicants are likely to succeed compared to whites. Moreover, there can be significant variations between institutions: for example, in the unnamed eight universities, the rates of acceptance for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis is very similar to blacks, and in two cases worse (Taylor, 1992, pp. 14, 26).

What is to explain the differential acceptance-rates at similar scores and the differences in the overall acceptance-rates? UCCA offer five reasons (UCCA, 1992, pp. 6–7). They point, first, to the low applications from ethnic minorities for courses with low entrance requirements, notably teacher training courses, which at 12.6 have the lowest mean points score of accepted applicants. Second, and conversely, as we saw earlier, more than 20% of applications from ethnic minorities are to medicine and law, three times that of whites, and yet these are the hardest subjects in which to gain acceptance (a mean of 26.7 and 25.5 A-level points respectively). Third, ethnic minorities are more likely to apply to a limited set of universities. For while only a third of whites are likely to apply to a university in their home region, 44% of Asian applicants and 52% of black applicants did so in 1991. As a result, because of the residential distribution of ethnic minorities, in 1992 41% of Asian and 50% of black applicants applied to the 35 institutions in London and the South East, compared to 20% of white applicants. Of course, each of these three factors means that ethnic minorities are in a situation of more intense competition than their white peers and that some who were not admitted would have been if they had applied for different courses or to other universities. Fourth, UCCA point out that 12% (in 1991) of

TABLE X. *Average A-level scores of applicants, UCCA 1990*

Ethnic group	Average points score
Asian–Bangladeshi	16.4
Chinese	16.8
Indian	17.0
Pakistani	15.7
Other	17.4
Black	14.0
White	18.0

applicants with two or more A levels had re-sat some or all of their examinations to get their final grades; ethnic minorities were more than twice as likely (up to three times as likely in 1990, Taylor, 1992, p. 29) as whites to be in this category and 'this will undoubtedly affect adversely their chances of acceptance, since selectors tend to give less weight to qualifications obtained after more than one sitting (UCCA, 1992, p. 7). In its 1989–1990 report, UCCA point out also that ethnic minority applicants have a lower average A-level score than whites (Table X).

It is of course difficult to estimate to what extent these five factors explain the differential selection-rates, and to what extent an issue of racial bias remains (UCCA take the view that 'any apparent racial bias largely disappears', UCCA, 1991). Certainly, each of the factors is relevant, though it is interesting to see that the explanation moves from the contingencies of more intense competition through accidents of circumstances (preference for medical subjects and law; for local institutions), to potential academic bias (a lower evaluation of A-level grades achieved through resits), to educational disadvantage (comparative A-level scores). The last two bring us squarely to the wider issues of structural inequality, access and the sociology of education. The University of Warwick analysis commissioned by the CVCP, referred to earlier, pursues this line further. From the extra 1990 data supplied by UCCA to the University of Warwick, it is possible to see the contribution of the wider structural conditions to the end result. For example, applicants to university from further and higher education colleges are considerably less likely to be successful in admission than those from schools; yet all ethnic minorities rely on this route to at least twice the extent of whites (17%), and nearly three times so in the case of blacks (48%) (Taylor, 1992, p. 28). The highest rates of acceptances are enjoyed by applicants from independent schools, a sector in which ethnic minorities, especially blacks and Pakistanis, are under-represented (though the ethnic minority applicants from this sector enjoy higher rates of acceptance than their white peers). Applicants with non-A level or equivalent qualifications have low rates of success and 34% of all black applicants are in this category, while about half of that percentage of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, though only 7% of whites (Taylor, 1992, p. 24). The University of Warwick analysis does not refer to mature students, but while each of the factors just considered would explain some of the difference in acceptance-rates and representation levels between the UCCA and the PCAS sectors; also relevant must be the fact that while new entrants over the age of 21 now make up half of all admissions to higher education, over 80% of them continue to be in polytechnics and colleges (DFE, 1992), and a greater proportion are likely to be black compared to other groups (PCAS, 1991, p. 92).

These factors are of course features of social class. It is therefore not surprising that the additional UCCA data show that, by and large in terms of parental social class, ethnic minorities are less represented in the professional and intermediate classes, and that the acceptance rate for these parental social classes is consistently higher (though not equal between groups) than for those coming from the skilled and unskilled working classes (Taylor, 1992, p. 27). Yet, what is more striking about this data are the ways in which dimensions of race and ethnicity upset the overall pattern of class. For example, the minority group which is the most successful in UCCA in terms of level of representation and rate of acceptance, the Chinese, has only a 5% representation in the professional class, a full half less than that of the next least professional groups (Pakistani and black), and without any proportionate increase in the size of the intermediate class to compensate. Or, that, in distinction to all other groups, the rates

of acceptance of blacks is unaffected by parental social class. The biggest anomaly for capturing differences by race and ethnicity within class analysis is the pervading underlying fact that groups with more disadvantaged class profiles than whites, a contrast which was probably even more severe in previous years and decades, produce much larger proportions of applicants and admissions in the national higher education system. The fact that despite all of the social and institutional (not to mention cultural) disadvantages stacked against them, some ethnic minorities are using higher education to alter their own class composition, offers one, if small, counter-example to the view that class inequalities in higher education remain unchanged, and that education has failed to operate as a force for 'class abatement'.

Moreover, just as what may be called racial disadvantage or racial bias is intricately connected to social processes, institutional norms and evaluation which do not directly have anything racial about them (but can be indirectly racially discriminating in virtue of their consequences), so similarly, in so far as there is an attitudinal racial bias at work in the university admissions process, it is unlikely to be, or to be merely, crudely 'racial' but will take the form of unfavourable evaluations which include and exacerbate cultural, religious and class bias. Thus, a stereotype of one group will focus on its narrow-mindedness and traditionalism on gender, another group may be imagined as having a mathematical excellence, another a sporting prowess; individuals of one group may be approached with the presumption that they are too aggressive, of another that they are too deferential; of one that it may have literary flair but not rational discipline, and of another the opposite; too protected by family structures or too knocked about by the 'inner-city'; and they may all be deemed to lack appropriate communication skills. Such stereotypes, which of course must have some basis in group differences, flow into outcomes which in turn reinforce stereotypical generalisations. If racial attitudinal bias is complex and interwoven with other kinds of evaluations, as racial institutional bias has been seen to be connected to the non-racial, then it follows that the bias and its effect will vary from ethnic group to group. Not only is there no simple racial bias which affects all non-white groups in the same way, but the bias against an ethnicity can certainly be overcome by extra qualifications or a higher parental social class. It may seem therefore that even in a situation of racial prejudice, the real causality lies with broader social processes. So that even where, say, a white middle-class individual will achieve greater systemic success than a white working-class person as well as a middle-class ethnic minority one; and even where the system prefers a working-class white to an equally qualified middle-class minority person; the class inequalities will have done their work to ensure that the working-class white individual is unlikely to be as well qualified as the ethnic minority middle-class person. Yet, that social class, however defined, is not all powerful has already been alluded to: virtually all working-class minority groups achieve better examination results than their white working-class peers. It may just be that the explanation does not lie in any long-term ethnicity, but in what we may call a certain 'mentality', associated with economic migrants amongst others, comprising of an over-riding ambition to better oneself and one's family, matched by appropriately high levels of deferred gratification; at the very least we have a situation where such advantages, be they of ethnicity or immigration, are converted into those of social class. This by itself does not eliminate racial bias, but does considerably lessen its impact. The situation is further complicated when different groups pursue this strategy to a different degree. The evidence from UCCA and PCAS suggests a complexity of just this sort with the Chinese and Indian situation rather different from that of the Afro-Caribbeans, with

that of the Africans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis sharing some features with the former and some with the latter (complicated further for some groups by gender). The level of representation is not the primary issue in respect of most of these groups. Yet, while, without exception, they seem to be already much more committed than their white counterparts to staying on in school and further education beyond the age of 16 (*The Guardian*, 23, June 1992), to persevere with examinations, including resits, and to entry into higher education, especially on vocational or career-relevant courses, they nevertheless offer considerable potential for further increases in the participation rate in higher education. They form highly targetable groups which already have the desire and motivation to enter higher education, but it would be foolish to ignore more class-based problems of access, and to ignore the under-representation of the less motivated, which means primarily the white working class. The class disadvantages of the under-represented ethnic groups suggest that focusing on the former may be the appropriate basis for access measures; whether the priority should be specific ethnicities or class, it does seem that action targeted at non-whites as such will not be the most successful in improving the access of under-represented ethnic groups, and that more complex approaches may be required.

## CONCLUSION

The numbers of ethnic minorities admitted through PCAS and UCCA in 1990 and 1991 refute the long-standing claim of under-representation, but reveal that there are significant differences between groups, between institutions and between subjects. In the PCAS system (the 'new universities'), Africans have a representation of more than 300%, closely followed by Indians, East African Asians and Chinese; even black Caribbeans and Pakistanis are over-represented, so that only the Bangladeshis and the 'other blacks' have an under-representation greater than that for whites. The concentration in certain polytechnics (in five polytechnics 40% or more admissions are minority ethnic) is regional rather than in lower-ranking institutions, and while minorities are over-represented in some subjects (e.g. business, engineering, law and medicine), and under-represented in others (e.g. languages, humanities and arts), the concentration is not necessarily in 'low-status' subjects. While most minorities are not under-represented in the UCCA sector, in total the minorities are there in only half the proportion they are in the other sector, and Afro-Caribbeans and Bangladeshis are significantly under-represented.

The levels of representation are partly a product of the differential rates of selection. In PCAS, nearly all minority groups did better than average, and whites only slightly worse than average. In UCCA, notwithstanding variations between institutions, the acceptance rates show a hierarchy with whites at the top, closely followed by the Chinese, with the Indians and Bangladeshis 5–10% below, Pakistanis about 15%, Africans around 20% below and Caribbeans 25% below—which means that only half as many Caribbean applicants as whites are likely to succeed. UCCA explain the lower acceptance of minorities by reference to the fact that fewer individuals from minorities apply for courses with low entrance requirements, while three times that of whites applied to medicine and law, the two hardest subjects in which to gain acceptance. Ethnic minorities were also more likely to apply to a limited set of universities, and at least twice as likely to have resat some of their examinations, a category of applicants not favoured by selectors. Ethnic minorities also have a lower average A-level score than whites. Further evidence also suggests that other features associated with under-

representation (comprehensive schools and further education colleges, non-A level or equivalent qualifications, etc.) are also factors, and so some of the factors in lower rates of acceptance for ethnic minorities are the same as apply in connection with the working class. Yet it is striking that most ethnic minority groups have worse class profiles than whites, but produce much larger proportions of applications and admissions in the national higher education system.

#### NOTES

- [1] This perception was confirmed by research into the 1991 GCSE and A-level results of students in Oxford City schools which found 'under-achievement' in all South Asian groups, but especially Bangladeshi and Pakistani males; whites and Afro-Caribbean formed the median, while the Chinese were well above it (Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford, forthcoming).
- [2] This statement was retracted at 'The Black Community and Higher Education' conference at Sheffield City Polytechnic, 6 July 1991. Mr Singh went on to identify a number of other racial equality issues in higher education (Commission for Racial Equality, 1991, p. 4).
- [3] PCAS ignored this in their 'News Release' summary accompanying the 1990-1991 Annual Report Statistical Supplement.
- [4] The LFS, aggregating data for the three years 1989-91, estimated non-whites in Britain to be 2,682,000, while the 1991 Census calculated that they formed just over 3 millions. I am grateful to my Manchester colleague Roger Ballard for supplying me with the Census figures when this article was at a proof stage. Unfortunately he was not able to supply me with data on the residual group of 'Other-Other'. This group forms about 1% of the population but has had to be omitted in the figures I use as the benchmark to calculate the level of representation in higher education. The result is that the level of representation of all other minority groups is understated as the figures I use overstate their *percentage* of the total 15-24 year-old population—this might fortuitously balance out against the suspicion that minorities might have been undercounted in the Census.

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