

Long-term trends in DP student outcomes at UK higher education institutions



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In 2016 and 2021, researchers¹ used United Kingdom (UK) Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to examine higher education outcomes of Diploma Programme (DP) students² compared to their A level peers. These studies included data from two consecutive periods (2007–08 to 2012–13 and 2013–14 to 2018–19) across 12 academic years.

In both studies, researchers used a statistical technique called propensity score matching to create equivalent samples of DP and A level students for comparison. This resulted in a group of DP students that were comparable (matched) to their A level peers based on demographic characteristics³ and prior academic achievement. The studies also reported odds ratios to indicate the likelihood of each higher education outcome for the two groups of students. Odds ratio is an indicator of how large the likelihood of an outcome is for one group of students compared to the other.

Specifically, an odds ratio of greater than 1 means that DP students have greater odds of achieving that educational outcome compared to similar (matched) A level students. For example, the odds ratio of 1.07 means that DP students were 7% more likely than A level students to achieve that particular outcome. We display the odds ratio results graphically, as a figure, and as a table, showing how these results can be interpreted.

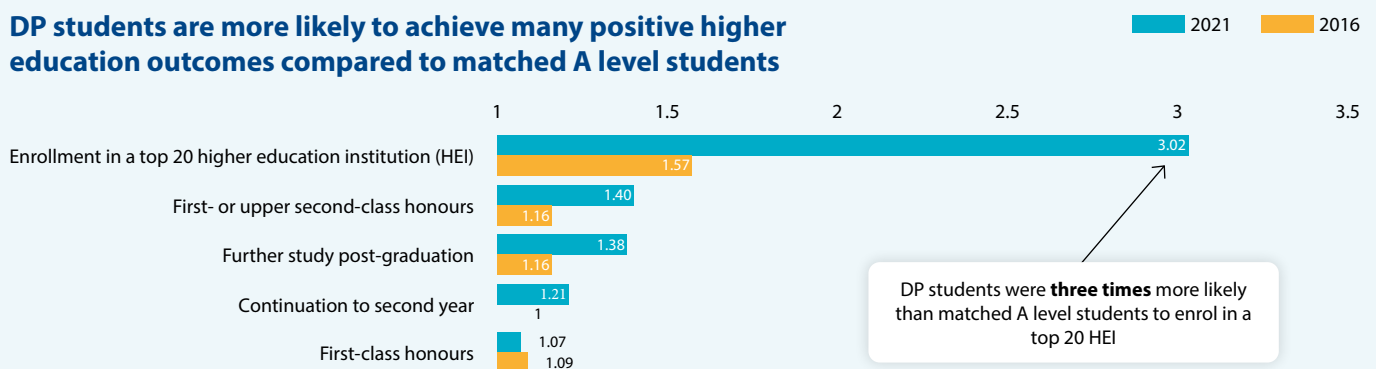
The studies examined the following outcomes:

- enrolment in a top 20 UK higher education institution (HEI)
- continuation to the second year of university study
- achievement of a first- or upper second-class honours degree and
- activity six months after completion of higher education.

The odds ratio results indicate that DP students perform significantly better than matched A level students on five higher education outcomes of interest. Moreover, these effects strengthen over time, with larger odd ratios in 2021 compared to 2016 on the following outcomes: enrolment in a top 20 HEI; achievement of a first- or upper second-class honours degree; further study post-graduation; and continuation to the second year of university. Notably, in 2021, the results show that DP students were three times more likely than matched A level students to enrol in a top university in the UK.

Overall, based on data spanning more than a decade of higher education enrolments, these results indicate that DP students have an advantage over matched A level students on key indicators of success in higher education.

DP students are more likely to achieve many positive higher education outcomes compared to matched A level students



Outcome	2021 result	2016 result
Enrolment in a top 20 higher education institution	DP students were three times more likely than similar A level students to enrol in a top 20 HEI.	DP students were 57% more likely than similar A level students to enrol in a top 20 HEI.
First- or upper second-class honours	DP students were 40% more likely than similar A level students to achieve a first- or upper second-class honours degree.	DP students were 16% more likely than similar A level students to achieve a first- or upper second-class honours degree.
Further study post-graduation	DP students were 38% more likely than similar A level students to be engaged in further study post-graduation.	DP students were 16% more likely than similar A level students to be engaged in further study post-graduation.
Continuation to second year of university	DP students were 21% more likely than similar A level students to continue to their second year of university study.	There was no difference between DP and A level students.
First-class honours	DP students were 7% more likely than similar A level students to achieve first-class honours.	DP students were 9% more likely than similar A level students to achieve first-class honours.

References

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). (2016). *International Baccalaureate students studying at UK higher education institutions: How do they perform in comparison with A level students?* International Baccalaureate Organization.

Duxbury, V., Westlake, C., Joice, W., & Jones, E. (2021). *International Baccalaureate students studying at UK higher education institutions: How do they perform in comparison with A level students?* International Baccalaureate Organization.

¹ Analytic teams at Higher Education Statistics Agency (2016) and Jisc (Duxbury et al., 2021).

² In both studies, the DP sample included students who were pursuing the full DP, with all of its courses and requirements, who were domiciled in the UK.

³ The DP and A level student samples were matched one to one using the following demographic characteristics: sex, socio-economic classification, ethnicity, state school marker and low participation marker.

Sources for figure and table: HESA, 2016; Duxbury et al., 2021.