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**Abstract**

The government is committed to widening access to higher education, yet applicants from ethnic minorities have 5.8 per cent less chance of gaining an acceptance than white. For some groups, for example Black-Caribbeans, the difference is even larger. Is this the result of institutional racism or because ethnic minorities have weaker qualifications than whites? The paper explores UCAS statistics from 1996?2000, which give around 1.38 million usable observations. Qualifications are the main determinant of success; but ethnicity has an additional positive effect. The paper investigates the reasons for this. Finally, it explores whether ethnic minorities are disproportionately concentrated in lower quality institutions. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)