

STUDY

Uni system 'is unfair on poor'

■ Disadvantaged students lack advice when applying

POOR teenagers are being put at a disadvantage by the current university application system, which relies heavily on predicted grades and personal statements, it has been suggested.

Bright teenagers from poor backgrounds are more likely to be predicted A-level grades lower than they actually achieve, according to a study published by the Sutton Trust.

This means that they can end up applying for degree courses with lower entry requirements than they are capable of getting.

At the same time, disadvantaged students are less likely to get help in preparing their personal statements, and to be able to provide many examples of their work and life experiences, it says.

The study, by Dr Gill Wyness of the UCL Institute of Education, calls for a major overhaul

of the system, with youngsters applying for degree courses after they receive the results of their A-levels and other qualifications.

It says that official figures show that in 2016, the most advantaged university applicants were about six times more likely to go to a "high tariff" insti-



Students from poorer backgrounds at a disadvantage

Study

tution - those with the highest entry requirements - compared with the most disadvantaged.

"Though the UK's admissions process is highly centralised, the process is still complex, time-consuming, and requires young people to make potentially life-changing decisions far in advance of university entry," it says.

"Many of the elements of this process may put students from poorer backgrounds at a disadvantage."

Bright poor students lack the information, advice and guidance they need when applying to university, it says, which leads to many making "sub-optimal decisions when choosing their universities".

"Students must make their course choices based on predicted rather than actual A-level exam grades," the study says.

"Evidence shows that the majority of grades are over-predicted, which could encourage students to make more aspirational choices.

"However, high-attaining disadvantaged students are more likely to have their grades under-predicted than their richer counterparts.

"This could result in them applying to universities which are less selective than their credentials would permit."

About 1,000 disadvantaged, high-achieving students a year have their grades under-predicted, it says.