



Parliamentary Briefing

Access and admissions to Oxford University

- In 2012 57.5% of UK undergraduate places at Oxford University went to state school pupils and 42.5% to independent schools.
- 20% of all Oxford University students (all nationalities) are black or minority ethnic.
- Around 9% of Oxford's UK undergraduates are from families with incomes under £16,000 (the free school meals threshold¹).
- Black pupils who receive 3 As at A level are more likely to apply to Oxford than other groups. However, black pupils are much less likely to achieve 3 As in the first place (5% against 14% of white students²).
- Of the 80,000 children eligible for free school meals in the UK in 2007, only 176 received 3 As at A level. Of those 45 (more than a quarter) got places at Oxford or Cambridge.

Diagnosing the problem

The 2010 Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances found that

“Analysis of outcomes in the UK education system shows that around 55% of children who are in the bottom 20% at age seven remain there at age 16, and less than 20% of them move into the top 60....”

and most recently the APPG on Social Mobility stated

“the point of greatest leverage for social mobility is what happens between ages 0-3”³.

Evidence based social policy on early years' intervention and governments of both parties have made this a priority.

Are the top universities admitting fairly?

While state schools educate 93% of all pupils, they account for only 67% of the pupils receiving 3As and above⁴. Oxford's Performance Indicator benchmark for state intake is 67%⁵. It currently offers 57.5% of places to pupils from this sector⁶. Oxford University argues that this shortfall can be accounted for as follows:

- Many AAA students apply for courses not offered by Oxford, such as veterinary sciences.
- Many AAA students have A levels in subjects not recognised by the University, such as General Studies.
- Many AAA students have not taken them in one go, which is required by the University.

¹ Only around one in ten of those actually took up free school meals

² 2011 Ucas data

³ (APPG Social Mobility, 2012)

⁴ (Harris, 2011)

⁵ HESA Performance Indicators 2010-11 (the latest available)

⁶ Oxford University figures for entry 2012 (www.ox.ac.uk/ug-stats)

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- Analysis by Oxford University has found that state school pupils tend to apply in disproportionately high numbers for the most oversubscribed courses: 35% of all state school applications are for just 5 subjects (Economics and Management, Medicine, PPE, Maths and Law)¹.
- UCAS evidence indicates that first generation students generally look to local universities, on average travelling 30 miles from home. Neither Oxford nor Cambridge has a significant high-density urban area within 30 miles.
- Less advice from teachers in state schools on subject choice at GCSE/A-level/university can mean students are less well prepared for particular courses.
- State school funding post-16 is dependent on the number of qualifications a student takes, so there is a financial incentive to push bright students to take as many as possible. Even if they still achieve top grades, this gives them less time to read around their chosen university subject and think about it in depth.

Geographical disparities

The population of the UK is not evenly distributed, nor is examination attainment equal across the country. In 2012, 34% of state-educated pupils in Reading achieved AAA grades, or better; while in Newcastle it was 8.2%. There are almost as many state-educated students in Hertfordshire who achieve AAA grades as there are in the entire North East of England.

Ethnicity

86.6% of 15-19 year olds in the UK are white, while white students represented 87.2% of the undergraduate intake at Oxford in 2011. The slight over-representation reflects in part a marked tendency among BME students to apply for the most over-subscribed subjects. For example, 7% of all white Oxford applicants applied for medicine in 2009, compared to 17.2% of Asian and 28.8% of black applicants.

Selection

The admission process for Oxford is based on academic ability alone, as demonstrated by:

- Predicted A level results
- Attained GCSE results
- A written aptitude test in a majority of subjects
- Multiple interviews

Oxford spends £2.5 million a year on outreach work, and more than £8 million on bursaries. The University already has direct contact with 78% of all schools providing post-16 education.

Oxford also provides highly-regarded summer schools for state school pupils. Of participants who go on to apply to the University, 40% are successful – double the overall success rate.

Oxford also has system of “contextual flags” in the application process, which highlights where an applicant will have suffered a particular educational or social disadvantage. The flagging system allows extra applicants to be invited for interview if they achieve other criteria.

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¹ Three-year average 2010-12