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April 2016

## **Increasing Access to Oxbridge #1**

Racial Inequalities in Admissions to Oxford University

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OxPolicy is a student run think tank that seeks to investigate and subsequently improve the quality of debate about important issues in our society.

**Report published**

April 30, 2016

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## Executive Summary

- According to the 2013/14 *Equality Report* published by the University of Oxford, 12% of undergraduates (UG), 19% of postgraduate taught (PGT), and 13% of postgraduate research (PGR) students from the UK are Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). UK-domiciled BME students comprise 13% of the total student population in the United Kingdom.
- Based on these results, Oxford ranks in the lower mid-range among Russell Group institutions. Cambridge has 5% more UK-domiciled BME students. London-based institutions are leading in the rankings of the Russell Group.
- Of the students interviewed for this report, around half felt that their ethnicity directly affected their application and admissions experience at Oxford.
- Several students expressed personal doubts about whether they would fit into the Oxford community or whether they would have a good experience at Oxford in general. On these grounds, a number of students were in doubt whether to apply or not.
- However, students expressed greater concerns over the discrepancy between state schools and selective schools (Grammar schools, academies or private schools in particular) than over racial or ethnic discrimination.
- While all interviewed students deemed the available support services at selective schools to have been helpful, students who did not benefit from such support considered it to be a disadvantage.
- In France, access to elite universities is restricted by a process of entry examinations. Since the early 2000s, elite universities have taken actions to limit social discrimination in their selection process.
- At the French *Grandes Ecoles* measures are being advanced to lower the barrier of entry for socioeconomically disadvantaged students (e.g. the “Conventions Education Prioritaire” (CEP) program at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, commonly referred to as Sciences Po) and to support disadvantaged pupils in the years leading up to their university application. Both approaches do not specifically seek to address issues of race or ethnicity, but rather focus on socioeconomic factors.
- The United States has had a long history of racial inequalities in terms of access to higher education. Federal programs, private individuals and universities have taken steps to support ethnic minority students and students of color.
- Federally funded programs, such as Upward Bound, and privately funded programs, such as A Better Chance and Prep for Prep, have had substantial successes in facilitating

ethnic minority student access to elite colleges. Ivy League institutions offer various support services, such as mentoring and financial support, to socioeconomically disadvantaged students and particularly ethnic minority students.

- Policy recommendations:
  - *At Oxford*: more outreach initiatives at state schools and in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas; increasing coaching and support for pupils applying from schools with limited support services; heightening the visibility of backgrounds and experiences of BME students at Oxford; generally improving support services for BME students at Oxford.
  - *Beyond Oxford*: improving university application support services for students at state schools; and more comprehensive media coverage of racial and ethnic issues at Oxford.
  - *Long-term solutions*: larger investments into state schools, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged regions.

## **Increasing Accessibility to Oxbridge – why is this important?**

*"If you're a young black man, you're more likely to be in a prison cell than studying at a top university" Prime Minister David Cameron*

This highly controversial statement was made by UK Prime Minister and Oxford alumni, David Cameron, in January 2016. However, many have also observed issues of discrimination at Oxford. For many years, public and political discussions have featured issues surrounding a lack of diversity at top UK higher education institutions. At the University of Oxford in particular, 2015/16 is proving to be a period of heated debate and unprecedented turmoil on questions of racism.

The Higher Education Act of 2004 allows Universities to set variable fees alongside a gradual rise of tuition fees, which have surged to £9000 for undergraduate students by 2012. The increased expenses for university students have opened the door to heated debate on equality and equity in British higher education. The government has tried to counter-act the negative impact of tuition fees on students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds by establishing the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) in 2004. Universities have to sign access agreements with OFFA, in which they outline their proposed measures to safeguard equal access for students from all backgrounds<sup>1</sup>. While OFFA's strategic plan for 2015-2020 includes the aim to "increase the proportion of learners from under-represented and disadvantaged groups who enter, succeed in and are well prepared to progress from higher education to employment or postgraduate study", many critics argue that OFFA is an ineffective institution<sup>2</sup>.

Equity in access to higher education and particularly to Oxbridge is an issue at the heart of British society. Oxbridge retains its position as the guarantor for social, economic and political success in Britain and beyond. As with all debates about education, racial inequalities at Oxbridge are not just a problem of current inequalities but also predict the trajectory of individuals, the universities and British society in the years to come. The issue is thus of symbolic and practical importance for considerations of equality and social justice in Britain.

In a society that embraces values of equal opportunity, race is a key aspect of diversity. The under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students at Oxbridge has to be seen as complementing and overlapping with questions of fair access for students with disabilities, from underprivileged neighborhoods or low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The main part of this report is based on qualitative research that looks at the admission and application experience of BME students at Oxford. After presenting and discussing the findings of semi-structured interviews with BME students the report moves on to short comparisons

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see OFFA website: <https://www.offa.org.uk/about/>

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, "University of Oxford rebuts Cameron's claims over student diversity." Accessed at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/31/university-of-oxford-rebuts-camerons-claims-over-student-diversity>

with equal access initiatives in France and the United States. These comparisons aim to see how other countries deal with questions of racial diversity in elite higher education. We close the report with policy recommendations for the UK based on the study of all three country cases.

### **Racial Inequalities in British Higher Education- the situation at Oxford**

The Higher Education Act of 2004 brought debates about equity in Higher Education to the fore and the subsequent increase in student fees caused heated debate. Considering the connection between race and class in Great Britain, many critics argued that the increase in tuition fees would only further raise barriers of entry to higher education for BME students. Critics also argue that there are too few bursaries and scholarship to contain the negative impact of fees on students from disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>3</sup>. The spotlight was shone on the lack of diversity at Oxford and Cambridge because of their leading role in British Higher Education. The symbolic importance of Oxbridge is a privilege and a burden bringing them continuously into national and international headlines. Racial inequality in access to Oxford is a trifold issue; fewer BME students apply to Oxford, the percentage of successful BME applications is lower than that of white students and among BME students some categories, like black, are particularly underrepresented.

Under the Freedom of Information Act of 2000 and amidst discussions about the Higher Education Act of 2004, the University of Oxford started publishing statistics on racial diversity in 2003. In this *Race Report* the university published figures on the race of its students and staff. According to the report 10% of British undergraduate (UG) students were BME. At the postgraduate taught (PGT) and postgraduate research (PGR) level the number of British BME students was at 12% and 9% respectively (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Student numbers by ethnicity, University of Oxford, 2003-2004

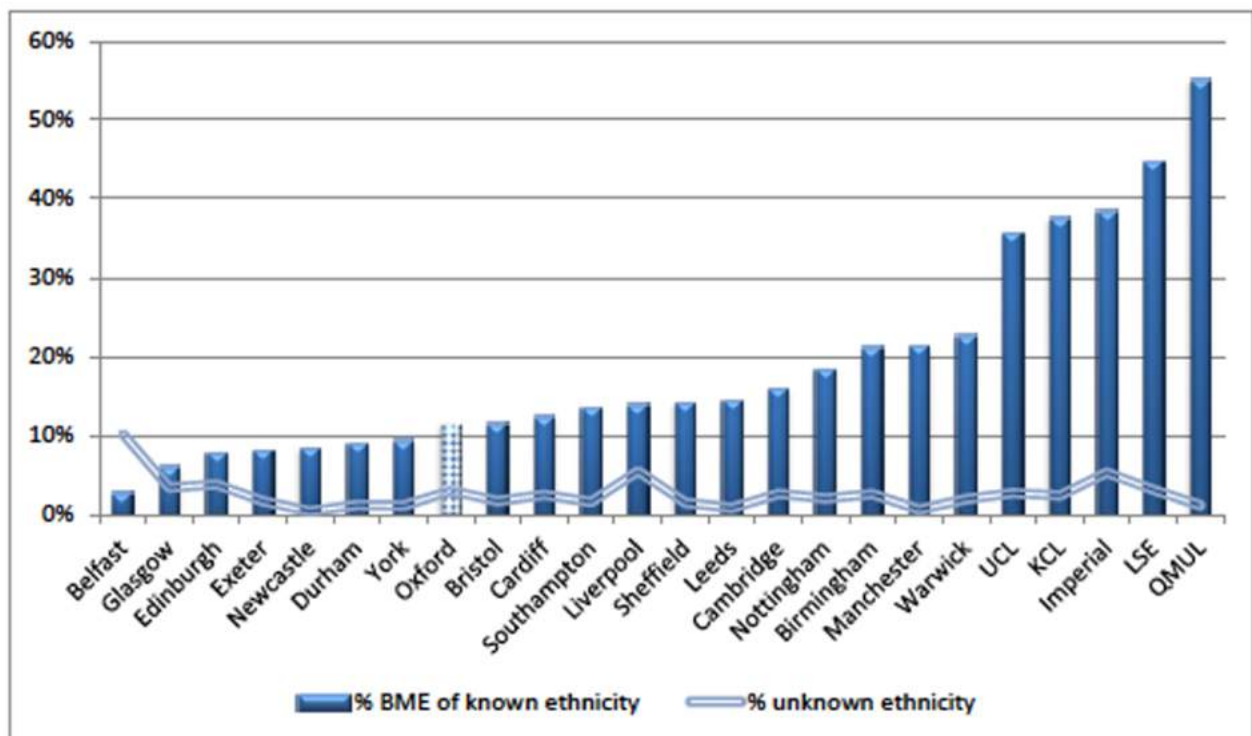
		<b>Home</b>	<b>Overseas</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Home%</b>
<b>UG</b>	White	9004	684	9688	90
	BME	1028	497	1525	10
	Total of known ethnicity	10032	1181	11213	100
<b>PGT</b>	White	717	862	1579	88
	BME	96	483	579	12
	Total of known ethnicity	813	1345	2158	100
<b>PGR</b>	White	1435	1104	2539	91
	BME	141	622	763	9
	Total of known ethnicity	1670	1848	3518	100

Source: University of Oxford, *Race equality at Oxford: Report for 2003-2004*.

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian, "Oxford and Cambridge need colleges exclusively for state school pupils." Accessed at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/24/oxford-cambridge-colleges-exclusively-state-school-pupils>

Despite the universities efforts since the first *Race Report*, there have only be modest improvements. According to the 2013/14 *Equality Report* published by the University 12% of UG, 19% of PGT and 13% of PGR students from the UK are BME. UK-domiciled BME students comprised 13% of the total UK student population<sup>4</sup>. These most recent available statistics do not make Oxford the least diverse institution among the Russell Group institutions. However, Oxford has far fewer BME students than London universities and about 5% fewer than Cambridge (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Percentage of BME students at Russell Group institutions, 2013-2014



Source: University of Oxford, *University of Oxford: Equality Report 2014*.

According to the 2011 census of England and Wales, 14% of the population are non-White<sup>5</sup>. Comparing this to the 13% of UK BME students at Oxford, suggests that the representation of minority students at the university matches the national average. However two aspects have to be considered here. Firstly, particularly among undergraduate students the underrepresentation is still more marked. This suggests that a BME student’s way to Oxford is

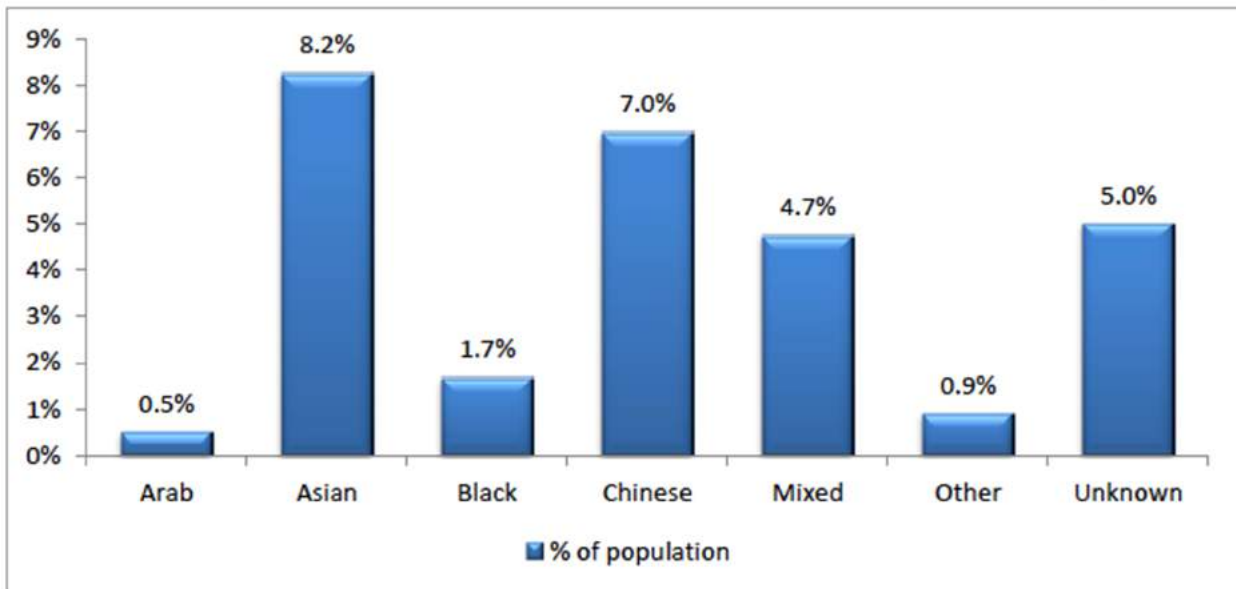
<sup>4</sup> 1784 out of 13,489 students, all levels of study, 3% unknown; University of Oxford, *University of Oxford: Equality Report 2014*, p. 27

<sup>5</sup> United Kingdom, Office for National Statistics, “Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011.” Accessed at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

longer acquiring an undergraduate degree at another university first. Secondly, when taking a closer look at the breakdown of BME students at Oxford it becomes evident that some ethnicities are particularly underrepresented. On the 2011 census, 3% of the population were classified as black. Among the students of Oxford however only 1.7% are black, including foreign students, which tend to be more diverse (see Figure 2). This has to be seen in the light of strong overlaps between race and class in the UK. Around two-fifths of people from ethnic minorities live in low-income households, twice the rate for White people. 30% of Indians and Black Caribbean and 50% of Blacks of African origin live in low-income households. The rates for people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are even higher<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 2.** BME students at the University of Oxford, by ethnicity, 2013-2014



Source: University of Oxford, *University of Oxford: Equality Report 2014*.

As mentioned earlier, the strong underrepresentation of some BME groups at Oxford is also due to the fact that only a small number of pupils from certain ethnic groups apply. The most recent *Equality Report* shows that only 1.8% of applicants for undergraduate degrees in 2013 were black and only 0.4% of applicants were Arab (see Table 2). Additionally, the already low number of BME applicants is also less likely to gain admission at the undergraduate level. In 2013, 13% of black applicants were successful while 25% of white applicants gained admission. That only 1.7% of students, including non-UK students, are black has to be seen as a consequence of low application rates and worse chances of admission for black pupils.

**Table 2.** Admission rate for UG students at the University of Oxford, by ethnicity, 2013-2014

<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom, The Poverty Site, "Low income and ethnicity." Accessed at: <http://www.poverty.org.uk/06/index.shtml>



	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Offers</b>	<b>Acceptances</b>
Arab	42	5	4
Black	218	32	29
Asian	957	146	129
Chinese	229	45	45
Mixed	584	155	142
Other	71	13	10
White	8783	2392	2234
Unknown	672	75	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>11556</b>	<b>2863</b>	<b>2644</b>

Source: University of Oxford, *University of Oxford: Equality Report 2014*.

In 2012 and 2014, the University of Oxford Student Union (OUSU) published *100 Voices Campaign 2: Black and Minority Ethnic Students of Oxford Speak Out*. In these reports they asked the entire student population how they feel about issues of race and ethnicity. The 2014 report found that 76% of respondents did not feel that there was an adequate level of diversity in Oxford’s student body. Many students cited structural inequality in the English educational system as the cause of this. 41% of BME respondents reported that they had expected race to affect their experience of the Oxford admissions process. These findings are largely corroborated by our research findings.

“I’d like to see a more race conscious admissions process. There’s only so much that can be done by throwing the responsibility back to schools. I don’t think affirmative action is the way forward, but in order to reverse institutional oppression it has to take something from the institution itself.” *Student quote from OUSU CRAE 100 Voices Campaign 2014*

For our research we spoke to 12 British BME students at the University of Oxford. All respondents answered the same questions in semi-structured interviews that lasted between 25 and 50 minutes. The interviews were conducted in March 2016. To gain a more thorough understanding of the application and admissions experience of BME students we spoke to students of various backgrounds and at various degree levels (please refer to Table 3. in the next section for more details). We contacted our interview partners through BME groups at Oxford and used on the contacts they established to BME students. We also relied on personal connections of the researchers.

In what follows we will outline the key findings of our research and provide some relevant quotes from our respondents. We analysed the interviews by looking for particular barriers and difficulties the students had experienced on their way to Oxford. Furthermore, we tried to harness the constructive criticism of the application and admission process that many of the interview partners had to offer. We used statistical data and secondary reports to further our understanding of the issue.

## **Research findings**

All interviews that were conducted for this research were carried out in March 2016. Overall, 12 Oxford students were interviewed and asked about their experiences during the period leading up to their application to Oxford, about the actual application process and about gaining admission to Oxford. While this is by no means a representative sample, many problems, ideas and sentiments were shared among the interviewees, irrespective of their race, gender or level of studies. Since all 12 students were successful in gaining admission to Oxford they serve as positive case studies. Interviews were thus conducted and analysed to filter out the elements that the 12 interviewees considered to have been important contributing factors in gaining admission to Oxford. While also taking a close look at the criticism they voiced and the problems they encountered we tried to find constructive suggestions for how BME students' access to Oxbridge could be increased.

**Table 3.** Total number of interviewees, by ethnicity and level of study, 2016

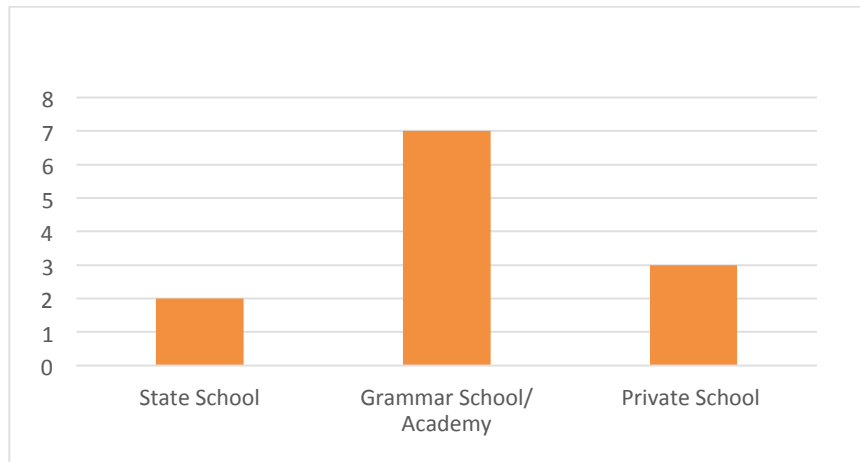
	<b>Black</b>	<b>Mixed (Black and White)</b>	<b>South Asian</b>	<b>Turkish</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Undergrad</b>	2		2	1	1	<b>6</b>
<b>Graduate</b>		3	3			<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>

Source: OxPolicy.

### **Interviewees' backgrounds**

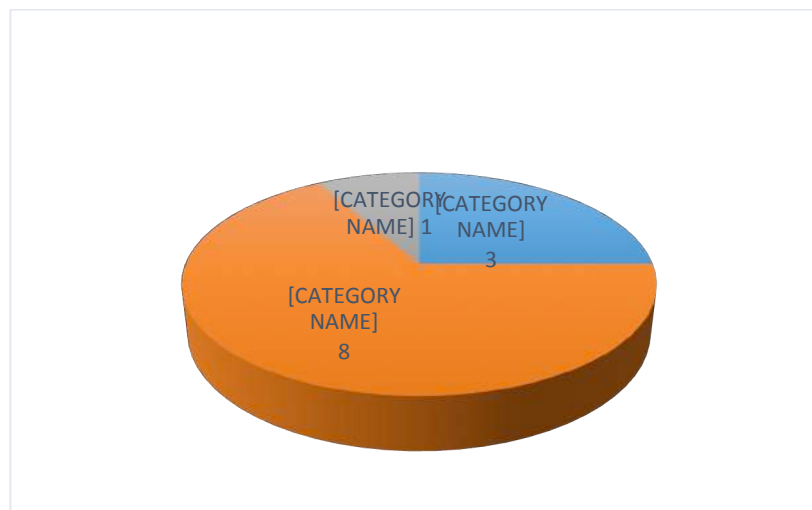
Overall, 10 of the 12 students we interviewed had attended a selective school (Grammar or Private School or Academy) in their final year of secondary education (see Figure 3). However, 3 of these 10 students at selective schools only attended these schools for the final year of their studies (see Figure 4). They cited the better reputation, level of teaching and support at the selective school as the reasons for their transfer.

**Figure 3.** Type of school attended in final year of secondary school, 2016



Source: OxPolicy.

**Figure 4.** Students that transferred for their final year of secondary school, 2016



Source: OxPolicy.

Whilst conducting the interviews we paid particular attention to how important the interviewees thought their BME status was during the application and admissions process. Half of the students stated that they did not think that race affected their way to Oxford. They pointed to other factors that might have constituted barriers, such as socioeconomic background or not having university educated parents.

The other 6 students however reported that being a BME applicant negatively affected their application and admissions experiences. Some interviewees felt that during the interview stage they were treated differently by fellow applicants and admissions tutors. Others stated that being an applicant from a minority ethnicity caused them to doubt

“White people don’t have to think about race. They don’t know what it is like to always have it in the back of your head” – interviewee when asked how the BME application process differs from that of non-BME applicants

whether they would fit into the Oxford community. Some went as far as saying that the widely-held image of Oxford as a university for white, middle and upper class students almost prevented them from applying or accepting the offer. However, since Oxford and Cambridge remain the highest ranked universities, the doubts about not fitting in were cast aside.

The students, who did feel that their race affected their path to Oxford cited the following factors as contributing to their doubts and hesitations when applying and accepting offers from Oxford:

- Widely held beliefs and assumptions about who gets admitted to Oxford (by teachers, family, friends, and applicants themselves)
- Lack of diversity in Oxford public relations campaigns
- Media debate and image of Oxford as a racist place that is often supported by the media

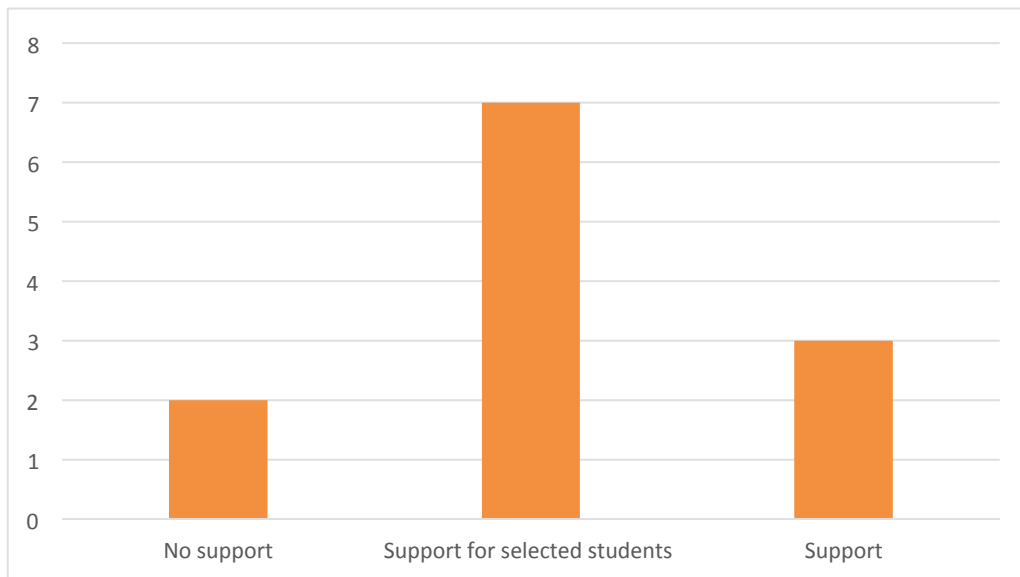
The students that did not report any negative effects of their race or ethnicity on their application process did however admit that their lighter complexion or their exposure to upper-class environments through attending selective schools might have reduced such affects. Irrespective of whether they thought race negatively impacted their experience or not, respondents agreed that class and family background affected the application and admission procedure.

In what follows we will look more closely at school support, socioeconomic background, outreach initiatives, the admissions interview, the BME experience at Oxbridge and the possibility of quotas.

### **School Support**

There is a clear divide in the level of support interviewees received from their schools during the university application process. Students, who attended private or grammar schools or academies reported that support for university applications was offered by the schools. In all schools where support was offered, students were completely or at least partially satisfied with the help they got. Students, who attended state schools however, received only minimal school support and were thus unsatisfied with the help they got when preparing their application for university and particularly for Oxbridge (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Type of support provided by secondary schools to assist pupils in their university applications, 2016



Source: OxPolicy.

Among the types of support that students received, in particular for University of Oxford applications, included the following:

- Guidance on what optional classes to choose in light of later application to Oxbridge
- Information sessions about Oxbridge at school
  - with Oxford alumni, who had attended the school
  - with teachers, who were Oxbridge alumni
  - with outside guests
- School trips to Oxford or Cambridge
- Support during the application writing process
- Subject specific support for application guidance and interview preparation
- Mock interviews with teachers or outside experts

BME students in selected schools did not feel that they received less support from teachers or tutors at their schools when preparing their university applications. In both grammar and private schools support seems to have been based only on grades, skills, and potential; race was not a factor. Indeed, those 10 students did not feel that they received a different treatment from the rest of their schoolmates. At these schools all students,

*“It was perfect. I got all the support I could have asked for.” Student when asked about the support received from school during the application process*

who were deemed qualified for Oxbridge were supported and usually the general expectation was that pupils would go to university upon graduating from secondary school.

*“It’s like stabbing in the dark. I did not know what to do, did not know what to write.” Student, who had attended a public school, about the university application process*

However, while it is laudable that BME students did not feel that their race negatively affected the school support they received, two negative aspects should be mentioned.

Firstly, many interviewees stated that teachers picked out few students that they considered to have the potential to go to Oxbridge. The support these students received was more intense than the support other students at the same school got. Out of the 10 students that got high quality support from their school when applying to university 7 reported that this service was selective and targeted at high-achieving students (see Figure 3). While it is understandable that teachers and tutors put particular effort into supporting candidates they consider promising, the selective nature of school support means that many other students lose out. Most interviewees reported that the support was meritocratic. However, some voiced concerns that the strong and persistent image of Oxbridge students as white might bias secondary school teachers in their assessment of who has the merit to gain access to Oxbridge. If this is true, it would mean that school support for university applications is indirectly tied to race.

A second negative aspect to consider is that state school pupils received little to no support. The fact that this research team was only able to find two British BME students at Oxford, who had attended and graduated from state schools, does not mean that there are not more such students. However, it is no surprise that their number is so low, when considering the disadvantage they are put at by being deprived of support like trips and talks, application writing or mock interviews. This unsatisfactory support at the school level was not due to the interviewees being discriminated against based on their race. At these school the above mentioned support facilities were generally missing.

All 12 students agreed that support of the kind listed above was very helpful and students who did not benefit from it, or felt that they did not benefit from it sufficiently, agreed that it would have been useful for their application and admission procedure.

A general trend was that schools capitalized on their previous experience with Oxbridge. In schools, where former pupils had gained admission to Oxford or Cambridge or where staff members were Oxbridge alumni, support was more effective and extensive. Schools that have connections to Oxbridge are better able to support their pupils in gaining access. It therefore seems that the community of pupils gaining access to Oxbridge is internally connected and reproduced at the school level. State schools that currently have few or no Oxbridge alumni among their staff or former pupils have a harder time providing their current pupils with adequate ‘insider’-support and Oxbridge students from these schools are likely to remain very few in numbers.

## Socioeconomic factors

All interviewees agreed that it was primarily their school and the quality of teaching and support they received there that affected their chances to gain admission to Oxford. Three influences of the socioeconomic status of students have to be considered when discussing the relationship of socioeconomic background and admission to Oxford.

Firstly, BME pupils are more likely to study at state schools than at grammar school or academies or even at private schools. Therefore, the high quality of instruction and support pupils receive at such selective schools is less likely to reach BME students. This seems to be the case particularly outside London.

Secondly, selective schools indirectly prepare students for the admissions process in various ways. Interviewees, who had studied at private schools stated that the interaction with mainly white class-mates and teachers prepared them for the Oxford environment. Also the frequent one-on-one attention that is possible at private schools was mentioned to be similar to the interview setting and later teaching experience at Oxford, which again prepared pupils from such school for Oxford.

A third factor of socioeconomic background that interviewees mentioned were the experiences and expectations of their families. When asked about support beyond school, many interviewees mentioned that their parents had not gone to university and were thus unaware of the challenges of applying, particularly to Oxbridge. Alternatively, interviewees, who had parents or siblings that had gone to university or even to Oxbridge mentioned these personal connections as having been helpful when applying for university.

## Outreach initiatives

All the students interviewed strongly agreed that outreach campaigns were crucial and had to be extended and intensified. 6 out of the 12 students interviewed participated in outreach campaigns that had a particular BME focus. Some benefited from them as secondary school pupils while others became active in outreach initiatives upon arriving in Oxford. The other 6 interviewees did either not hear of such outreach campaigns or did not participate in them personally even though they knew people who did.

It is important to note that neither of the two students, who went to state schools benefitted from any outreach from Oxford, from colleges, from programs like UNIQ, from BME outreach campaigns or any other form of outreach from Oxford. In comparison, most of

*“They are great and there should be more of them!” student when asked outreach campaigns with a particular BME focus*

*“It would make it more real, more human to have access also to unconventional stories to show that it is accessible” student when asked what kind of outreach would be effective for BME pupils*

*“There is a fine line between being patronizing and relieving the fears of BME students” – interviewee when asked how she felt about BME specific outreach campaigns*

the students from selective schools benefitted from some sort of Oxford-organised outreach, like open days or college link programmes.

When discussing their experience with outreach programmes, as pupils or upon arriving at Oxford, interviewees voiced the following criticisms:

- Outreach campaigns often do not target the right students since it seems that the students who need it less receive the most outreach.
- Outreach should target younger students before the qualifying exams since it might motivate some hesitant applicants.
- There should be more outreach from BME students or there should at least be easier access to the stories and experiences of BME students, to alleviate internal fears of BME pupils of not fitting in the Oxbridge traditional image.
- Visiting pupils should gain an insight into how Oxbridge life is and should be able to talk to students who can also advise programmes like UNIQ.
- The outreach should also target the parents. Parents, for most of these students were a great source of motivation and support; therefore, providing information to parents potentially in their first language can facilitate the application process for the student.

### **The interview stage**

Despite the tough and competitive experience for all applicants, certain students had various personal concerns prior to the interview stage concerning the elitist and non-diverse image of Oxford. Two students pointed at the fear of the interviewers' biases and the potential idea they might have of an Oxford student and the very Eurocentric panel of questions and interviewers. Two others felt that other people were more articulated and more prepared to be critical on the spot. Finally, one pointed at the fact that their interviewers looked a lot at the cultural capital compared to the potential of the students by asking questions related to travel experiences (assuming that a student applying to Oxford had travelled extensively), which directly makes someone feel not in the right place. Furthermore, being the only BME applicant that interviewees saw during their stay at Oxford for the admission interviews led some of them to feel even more out of place and insecure.

*"I was perhaps my own biggest barrier"- Interviewee when asked about the biggest barrier in gaining access to Oxford*

To overcome the issues regarding the interview, they suggested:



- Having compulsory race-consciousness training for interviewing tutors instead of optional ones.
- Focusing during the interview on potential and motivation rather than cultural capital that can discriminate depending on your preparation and your socioeconomic background.

In addition, to the above-mentioned differences, the extent to which pupils received support from school might further affect the applicant's performance during the interview.

### **When at Oxbridge**

When it comes to increasing the access to Oxbridge for BME students one has to consider the long-term implications. The situation would be only superficially changed if all improvement were measured by admission statistics. While much of the media debate centres surrounding admissions statistics, campaigns at the University of Oxford frequently point to the situation for BME students at the university.

Many interviewees pointed out that there are some aspects that make BME students' lives in Oxford different and sometimes more challenging. Issues that were mentioned during out interviews were a lack of specific welfare support for BME students, overt and covert racism and difficulties in adapting to Oxford as a learning and living environment. While several students pointed to some aspects that they thought were challenges particularly for BME students, other interviewees did not report such issues. In fact, 5 interviewees explicitly said that Oxford was much less racist than they had thought. However not adhering to a negative prejudice should not be mistaken as something positive in itself. Even students, that thought life in Oxford was less challenging for BME students than they had expected, still recalled instances where they had been made to feel uneasy about their ethnic background.

To improve this situation some interviewees stressed that it was crucial to get more BME students to Oxford for only then would the dynamics and atmosphere at the university change. Further suggestions for how life could be made easier for BME students include the following:

*"It is important to encourage BME students to come even if they might have hard moments; it is important to tackle racism at Oxford. BME students are still quite marginalized. Many of us come in thinking that this isn't really a place for us."*

-student on how to change the situation for BME students at Oxford

*"Accessibility at college is actually really bad and most initiatives focus only on getting BME people into Oxford"*

- interviewee when asked what kind of support s/he was missing

*"I started to wear a headscarf when was 17 and I felt that I would not fit in. [...] Later I went to the Oxford union in Sahri for a debate to show to outsiders that you do not have to fit with the 'common' Oxford image"*

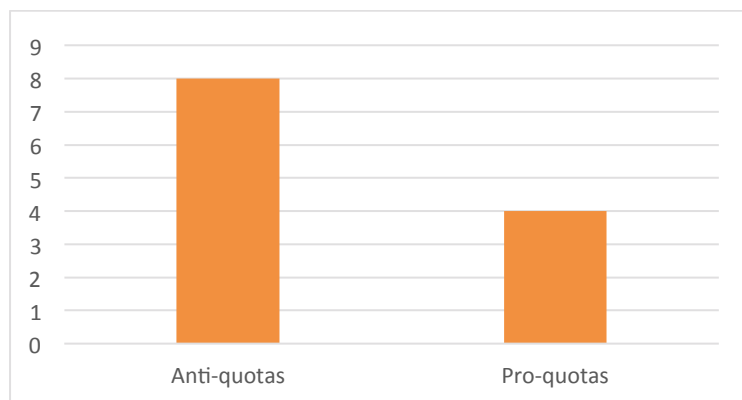
- Student on the image of Oxford

- Tackling the image of Oxbridge is crucial. One argued that it is by tackling the societal issue that Oxford will be leading change in the society and this change goes through having more diversity represented among students as well as in Oxford prominent governing positions. The appointment of a woman as Oxford’s vice-chancellor was seen as a positive example of how the university can become more diverse.
- Improving the welfare support of BME students by having more specialized support and/or staff
- Bridge programmes during the summer could be introduced or extended to facilitate the transition process from secondary school to university.
- Raising the awareness of fellow students as well as the teaching and non-teaching staff to issues of racial and ethnic diversity

### **Race based admission quotas**

Student opinion was divided when we asked them whether quotas could be a good way to increase the accessibility to Oxford. Quotas are used in other countries’ higher education systems and are also often discussed to increase the representation of women or ethnic minorities in government or economic leadership. Two thirds of the interviewees were against race based admission quotas (see Figure 4). Even the 4 students, who expressed themselves in favour of quotas, thought that other measures would have to be implemented concurrently.

**Figure 6.** Interviewee responses concerning race-based admission quotas



Source: OxPolicy.

Among those interviewed students that were against the implementation of quotas, students argued that the introduction of quotas would undermine BME students’ self-confidence and could cause further problems for their life at Oxford. Quotas might lead to non-BME students and professors judging them as less qualified and second-rate students or blaming them for undermining the quality of Oxford students. Quotas could therefore further accentuate the

internal fears of BME students to be out of place. Additionally, they could undermine the standing of BME students among their professors and peers.

Students, who expressed support for quotas suggested that it could help to change the Oxbridge image held in society, which would subsequently lead to more diversity, beyond the impact of quotas. Quotas for low income groups or students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods were suggested as a less problematic alternative to race based quotas. It would thus be less obvious, who was benefitting from the quota. This would lead to diversification without the negative impact of increased prejudices. Students in favour of quotas agreed that they would bring about rapid change in admissions figures but that they would not change the underlying issues.

Problems and inequalities in the quality of schooling and support from schools, the impact of a young person's socioeconomic background and the atmosphere at Oxford would not be improved by introducing quotas.

## **Looking across the Channel: France as a Case Study**

### **Background on the *Grandes Ecoles***

Considering that the Republican principles are applied to the French educational system, people are equal in their right to be educated; education is accessible to all without discrimination. Yet, intellectual capacities are considered legitimate inequalities that differentiate the elites. Testing these capacities are the purpose of entrance exams through which *Grandes Ecoles* (or elite schools) select students. This meritocratic selection makes elitism more acceptable to the population. Compared to the US, affirmative action is not conceivable in France since the constitution of 1958 stipulates that each individual is equal in front of the law without origin, ethnic or religious differentiation. Thus, ethnic inequalities cannot be directly addressed; instead the government can only tackle socioeconomic disparities, taking the issue from the roots.

*Grandes Ecoles* are higher education establishment functioning independently from the regular university system. Students are admitted through competitive written and oral exams usually after two years of preparatory classes for the exams (except for the Parisian university, Science Po). Even though admission to the *Grandes Ecoles* was originally seen as a purely meritocratic selection, it soon became clear that socially privileged students were more easily selected and that the system reproduced social privilege and therefore perpetuated social inequalities. Considering the direct connection between the *Grandes Ecoles* and the French political and economic elite the state and elite higher education institutions are seen as mutually reinforcing each other. This is closely linked to Bourdieu's argument that people from the upper class

“work to reproduce or improve their social positions within and outside the state through their control over elite education institutions.”<sup>7</sup>

### **A few statistics**

In addition to being highly selective *Grandes Ecoles* have large inequalities of access depending on social origin.<sup>8</sup> In 2002, 62% of the students admitted in the *Grandes Ecoles* had parents from the executive branch, compared to 5.7% of children of employees and 5.2% of children of manual workers.<sup>9</sup> The proportion of students with a working class background decreased from 29% in the 1950s to 9% in the 1990s. While employees and manual workers represent 60% of the French population, their children represent only 6% of the students of l’ENA, less than 1% of the students of Polytechnique, 3.4% of management school and 6.1% of engineer schools.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, researchers have found that selection panels “are more likely to mistrust the academic value attached to students applying from socially and ethnically diverse *lycées* as they tend to consider that teachers working in these schools are ‘overindulgent’ in their assessments and cover curricular subjects in less depth.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the selection process also tends to be biased toward upper class students.

Facing the growing criticism from intellectuals, the *Grandes Ecoles* have been pressured to adapt to this growing diversity and stand up for its original republican principle by fighting inherited social inequalities and promoting meritocracy.

### **Initiatives**

In January 2005, the president of the *Grandes Ecoles* conference signed the “Charte de l’Egalité des Chances d’accès aux formations d’excellence” (Charter for equal opportunity to access elite schools). A working group was set up to explore solutions and ideas to make the *Grandes Ecoles* a major actor in promoting equal opportunity. In 2008 the “Cordées de la Réussite” was issued aiming at implementing and institutionalizing actions. The *Grandes Ecoles* started to tackle the problem by looking at the social backgrounds of students.<sup>12</sup> They chose to address four levers

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<sup>7</sup> van Zanten, Agnès. 2015. *La Formation des Élités: Sélection et Socialisation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Baudelot, Christian, and Frédérique Matonti. 1994. “Les Normaliens: Origines Sociales et Recrutement Social des Normaliens 1914–1992.” In Jean-François Sirinelli (ed.) *Ecole Normale Supérieure. Le Livre Du Bicentenaire*. Paris: PUF, pp. 155–190.

<sup>9</sup> Sénat. “Diversité sociale dans les classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles : mettre fin à une forme de ‘déficit d’initié’” Rapport d’information n° 441, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Institut Montaigne. “Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité.” January 2006.

<sup>11</sup> van Zanten, Agnès. 2015. *La Formation des Élités: Sélection et Socialisation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

<sup>12</sup> Dardelet, Chantal. 2010. Livre Blanc Ouverture sociale des grandes écoles. Conférence des grandes écoles, La Documentation Française; Institut Montaigne. “Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité.” January 2006.

for an efficient action<sup>13</sup> (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Overview of approaches with which to tackle inequalities at the *Grandes Ecoles*, France

Upstream	(1) outreach to promote the <i>Grandes Ecoles</i> to people from unprivileged backgrounds; (2) information on various branches, potential job perspectives; (3) tutorials to prepare the students to entry exams. Tutorials aim at empowering those students and made them believe they could engage in this education, remove the self-censorship.
Recruitment	(1) training thanks to tutorials and advice to have a higher chance of success at the entry exam; (2) diversifying the recruitment (only 46% of student access to those school through the original <i>Classe Préparatoire</i> ) by creating parallel bridges between different formations; (3) creating new and more branches
Material assistance	(1) entry exam often free for grant holders; (2) increasing the numbers of paid internships during the programme; (3) increase the number of grants.
Accompanying the students along the studies	To ensure success in the <i>Grandes Ecoles</i> , 36% of the <i>Grandes Ecoles</i> offer to accompany the student step by step in the education and professional choices, provide additional catch-up courses, and interview coaching...

54% of the *Grandes Ecoles* have a team working specifically on those issues. 44% participate in the working group created in 2005. They invest important funds specially to help student finance their studies and for the tutorials. For instance, for the tutorial alone 27% of the *Grandes Ecoles* spend more than 100,000 euros. More generally, according to the Conférence des Grandes écoles report, 51% of the *Grandes Ecoles* in 2009-2010 put in place some mentoring or tutorials in high schools. In addition of those intensive actions, 83% of the *Grandes Ecoles* have had punctual actions (visit, forum...) in high schools. In addition, today all the *Grandes Ecoles* together tutor 10,000 students and 100,000 students will be approached by some kinds of outreach actions.<sup>14</sup>

**“Une grande école: pourquoi pas moi ?” (ESSEC) vs. “Convention Education Prioritaire” (Science Po)**

<sup>13</sup> Dardelet, Chantal. 2010. Livre Blanc Ouverture sociale des grandes écoles. Conférence des grandes écoles, La Documentation Française; Institut Montaigne. “Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité.” January 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Dardelet, Chantal. 2010. Livre Blanc Ouverture sociale des grandes écoles. Conférence des grandes écoles, La Documentation Française.

In 2002 ESSEC management school launched a programme called “*Une Grande Ecole: Pourquoi pas moi?*” (PQPM) to address equal opportunity and help high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach their full potential and, if they want, to take the *concours*. This programme follows what they called the affirmative action ‘à la française’ to “ensure the *real* equality of all before an anonymous examination, and thus to restore a broken meritocracy.”<sup>15</sup> The programme commits during two years and a half to 3 hours of tutorial per week by volunteer students from ESSEC. They also have access to workshops and opportunities to travel abroad. Even though tutorials end when they sit the Baccalauréat, “over 90% of PQPM students stay in touch with the programme throughout their higher education”<sup>16</sup> to be advised regarding academic path, financial issues, etc.

The other programme “Conventions Education Prioritaire” (CEP) initiated by Science Po in 2001. It offers an alternative entrance selection procedure for students depending on the student population. Instead of taking the *concours*, students from underprivileged backgrounds gain access to Sciences Po universities if they pass the Baccalauréat and write a press review and an oral exam.<sup>17</sup> By 2015 almost 1450 students had been admitted through CEP since 2001.

### *Assessing the Results*

The PQPM programme tackles the issue at its source by suppressing the code, material, and psychological barriers of student from disadvantaged backgrounds. Taking from Kevin André’s study of 324 students following this programme, the results seem promising since 30.3% choose the elite track (compared to 19.31% national average), and these results are even more significant among female with 35.66% (compared to 15.79% national average).<sup>18</sup> The PQPM broadened its scope and created “CAP ESSEC” and “CAP BBA” in 2010 to mentor students coming from other schools through bridges and a diversification of the access to ESSEC. Out of 110 students intensively preparing this alternative *concours*, 38 took the *concours* and 20 were successfully admitted to ESSEC.<sup>19</sup> The limit of this programme is the challenge to extend it nationally as it is an intense mentoring on high school students by university students.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1997 and 2007, the percentage of children of manual workers and employees at

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<sup>15</sup> André, Kévin. 2013. “Applying the Capability Approach to the French Education System: An Assessment of the “Pourquoi pas moi ?” Programme.” ESSEC Working paper; Institut Montaigne. “Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité.” January 2006.

<sup>16</sup> André, Kévin. 2013. “Applying the Capability Approach to the French Education System: An Assessment of the “Pourquoi pas moi ?” Programme.” ESSEC Working paper; Institut Montaigne. “Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité.” January 2006.

<sup>17</sup> van Zanten, Agnès. 2015. *La Formation des Élités: Sélection et Socialisation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

<sup>18</sup> André, Kévin. 2013. “Applying the Capability Approach to the French Education System: An Assessment of the “Pourquoi pas moi ?” Programme.” ESSEC Working paper

<sup>19</sup> Peltier, Cécile. ““Une grande école, pourquoi pas moi?” de l’ESSEC: untremplin pour vous donner des ailes.” *L’Étudiant*, 12.05.2015.

<sup>20</sup> van Zanten, Agnès. 2015. *La Formation des Élités: Sélection et Socialisation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Sciences Po increase from 3% to 10.1% largely thanks to the CEP.<sup>21</sup> This increase is however, only one in absolute numbers, since the overall student population also grew in the same period. While Sciences Po alters the *concours* to accommodate lower-class students, ESSEC takes a different approach and supports pupils to take them for the same *concours*.

While 67% of those benefitting the CEP have a parent born outside of France, 75% of those benefitting the PQPM have a parent born outside of France. Those two programmes seem to have largely targeted the children from immigrated families, therefore responding to the social openness but maybe focusing less on the lower class as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, the impact of those programmes is still unclear, more institutionalization is still to be achieved. Despite those limited changes, the *Grandes Ecoles* have reduced their criticism and reshaped their image by tackling the socioeconomic reproduction in *Grandes Ecoles* moving toward less hierarchic and more democratized education.

Considering that *Grandes Ecoles* do not want to lower their academic standards, they would be less likely to favour the CEP. In addition, the CEP does not take the problem at its roots; many students thus admitted to Sciences Po struggle and repeat a year. That is why, we would recommend following some roots actions on underprivileged backgrounds (and potentially in the UK focusing specifically on minorities) like the PQPM. It would not be surprising, considering the effort of information and actions, that it would increase the aspiration of students from unprivileged backgrounds.

## **Looking across the Atlantic: the United States as a case study**

### **Background on United States Programs – Funding and Assistance**

Ethnic minorities, both native-born and immigrants, currently account for 38% (18% Hispanic, 12% black, 6% Asian, and 2%) of the population in the United States.<sup>23 24</sup> However, equal opportunity in education for all citizens in the United States has been a continually evolving journey that has unfolded *via* communities and the courts and predominated societal discourse on historically tenuous race relations in America. Prior to the mid-1950s, segregationist policies limited educational opportunities for people of colour in the American south. Many cities and

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van Zanten, Agnès. 2015. *La Formation des Élités: Sélection et Socialisation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

van Zanten, Agnès. 2015. *La Formation des Élités: Sélection et Socialisation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center Report. “10 Demographic trends that are changing the US and the World.” March 31, 2016. Accessed at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>

<sup>24</sup> Pew Research Center Report. “Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 million to US.” September 28, 2015. Accessed at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>

regions in the American north and west also adopted discriminatory practices that mimicked Southern exclusionary segregation tactics. The result: “separate but equal” educational facilities that were often sub-par for children of colour.<sup>25</sup>

The Supreme Court decision of 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* paved the way for the desegregation of public schools in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Since then, ethnic minorities have made significant strides through hard-won legal gains and increased social stature during the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s. However, discrimination and challenges persist and include re-segregation in the wake of less stringent government oversight of school demographics, socioeconomic disparities in secondary schools that often accompany re-segregation, continuing discrimination in educational tracking, and self-esteem and identity challenges in the academic environment among students of colour.<sup>27 28 29 30</sup>

### **Federal Programs**

The historical legacy of obstacles to quality education for students of colour lingers today. However, the United States federal government has taken steps to address the issue by supporting a number of programs at colleges and Universities, secondary schools, and in communities for the support of socioeconomically students.

These programs are primarily the TRIO Programs, which include:

- (1) Upward Bound,
- (2) Upward Bound Math-Science,
- (3) Veterans Upward Bound,
- (4) Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP),
- (5) Talent Search, the Student Support Services program,
- (6) Educational Opportunity Centers,
- (7) The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement program, and
- (8) The Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff.<sup>31</sup>

For example, Upward Bound students receive supplemental academic training in their schools either after school or before school or at another designated time. Additionally, they have

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<sup>25</sup> Groves, Harry. (1951) “Separate but Equal – the Doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson.” *Phylon* 12 (1): 66-72.

<sup>26</sup> United States, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

<sup>27</sup> Propublica. “Segregation Now. The Resegregation of America’s Schools.” 2016. Accessed at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/segregation-now-the-resegregation-of-americas-schools/#intro>

<sup>28</sup> Rowley *et al.* (1998) “The relationship between racial identity and self esteem in African-American College and high school students.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74: 715-724.

<sup>29</sup> Awad, Germine H. (2007) “The role of racial identity, academic self-concept, and self-esteem in the prediction of academic outcomes for African-American students.” *Journal of Black Psychology* 33: 188-207.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Dynarski. “Why Talented Black and Hispanic Students Can Go Undiscovered.” April 8, 2016. Accessed at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/upshot/why-talented-black-and-hispanic-students-can-go-undiscovered.html>.

<sup>31</sup> 34 CFR Ch. VI Pt. 645



academic enrichment training over the summer at a chosen college or University. Participation in a TRIO program increases the likelihood that an otherwise a socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or ethnic minority student will enroll in a four-year institution of higher learning by 18-38%. The median amount of time a student participates in a program is 19 months. However, students who remain in the program longer have better outcomes. A group of 2,800 students were randomly sampled at 67 two and four year colleges for the study.<sup>32</sup> Upward Bound Math and Science received \$43,050,368 in funding in 2014-2015, with 162 awards made to institutions and a total of 10,034 program registrants at a cost of \$4,290 per participant. Each award averaged \$265,743.<sup>33</sup> Upward Bound has achieved varied success in getting people into colleges, including the Ivy League institutions.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these efforts, significant data regarding outcomes federal programs with regard to success in preparing socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or ethnic minority students for colleges, data for students who matriculate at Ivy League institutions is more varied. One possible reason is that whereas the Upward Bound program strives to engage students with the idea of pursuing a higher education, the private programs seek to prepare students for elite colleges and universities, as well. Additionally, many students do not apply, opting instead to remain closer to home. First generation college students and their families who may lack sufficient information to make informed decisions may hinder student applications to highly ranked academic institutions. Societal and family pressures also contribute, along with a need to work to attain additional income in college. Other possible reasons could include variations in program management and teaching quality, insufficient time to fully dedicate staffing and learning resources for each student.

### **Privately-Sponsored Programs**

Corporately funded programs use immersion to completely envelop students in the college preparatory experience. Often, students attend elite boarding secondary schools that serve as “feeder institutions” for the Ivy League. Examples are those of the A Better Chance (ABC) and the Prep-for-Prep program.<sup>35</sup>

Since 1963 ABC has been instrumental in the success of over 14,000 ethnic minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth.<sup>36</sup> President John F. Kennedy expressed support for the program prior to his death, citing the need for improved efforts at ensuring that children of colour would have the opportunity to compete for admission to ABC-affiliated elite educational

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<sup>32</sup> US Department of Education. 2004. “Reports Highlights: The Impact of Regular Upward Bound: Results from the Third Follow-up Data Collection (2004)” Mathematica Policy research. April 29, 2004. Accessed at: <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/upward/upward-3rd-report.html>

<sup>33</sup> US Department of Education. 2016. “Data & research/evaluation of programs: Upward bound math-science.” Last modified January 26, 2016. Accessed at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomathsci/funding.html>

<sup>34</sup> Gonzales, Alicia. 2014. “Upward Bound Student Gabriel Reyes is Ivy League Bound” Accessed at: <http://news.unm.edu/news/upward-bound-student-gabriel-reyes-is-ivy-league-bound>

<sup>35</sup> Prep for Prep. 2016. “Prep for Prep.” Accessed at: <https://www.prepforprep.org/placement>

<sup>36</sup> A Better Chance. 2014. “A Better Chance: 2014 Annual Report” United States.

secondary preparatory institutions in the United States. These schools are considered “feeder schools” after which they are prepared for application to upper tier and Ivy League universities.<sup>37</sup>

Typically, ABC partners with elite secondary and college preparatory schools to reach nearly 2,000 disadvantaged children of colour, 65% of students in the program come from a home in which there is only one parent and many of whom are socioeconomically disadvantaged.<sup>38 39</sup> The ethnic breakdown of the students in the ABC program is 67% African-American, 15% Hispanic or Latino, 8% multi-ethnic, 6% Asian, 3% other, and less than 1% Native American.<sup>40</sup> The goal of the program is to place these otherwise underprivileged children on an accelerated leadership track. ABC’s mission: “to increase substantially the number of well-educated young people of colour who are capable of assuming positions of responsibility and leadership in American society.” Typically, ABC partners with corporate donors, whose support has resulted in over \$12 million in support in its most recent fundraising campaign. Supporters include Fortune 500 companies, philanthropic companies such as the Ford Foundation, and celebrities of the likes of Oprah Winfrey.

**Table 4.** A Better Chance program overview

<b>Years Operational</b>	53	
<b>Schools Nationwide (2013-2014)</b>	317 schools	22 Community School Programs
		102 Independent Boarding Schools
		193 Independent Day Schools
<b>Students enrolled and/or who have completed the program</b>	Over 14,000	
<b>Enrolled in 2013-2014 (most recent academic year recorded)</b>	1,971 students	

Source: A Better Chance. 2014. “A Better Chance: 2014 Annual Report” United States.

The rate of college enrollment for students who successfully complete the ABC program is 96%, with 90% earning Bachelor’s degrees and 60% going on to earn graduate degrees.

Prep for Prep has an even higher level of engagement with enrolling and successfully graduating students from Ivy League institutions in the United States. Like ABC, the program believes in full immersion of the students in the program, sometimes with boarding, to completely reorient the student and prepare him/her for the next level academically. Students

<sup>37</sup> Georgescu, Peter A. 2013. “A Better Chance Turns 50”. Huffpost Impact. Accessed at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-a-georgescu/a-better-chance-turns-50\\_b\\_3464410.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-a-georgescu/a-better-chance-turns-50_b_3464410.html)

<sup>38</sup> Meraji, Shereen. 2013. “Fifty Years Later, ‘A Better Chance’ Trains Young Scholars. National Public Radio. Accessed at: <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/06/09/184798293/fifty-years-later-a-better-chance-trains-young-scholars>

<sup>39</sup> Harvard Crimson. 2013. “The making of a Harvard feeder school.” December 13, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2013/12/13/making-harvard-feeder-schools/?page=single>

<sup>40</sup> A Better Chance. 2014. “A Better Chance: 2014 Annual Report” United States.

entering the Prep for Prep program are provided with guidance in selecting a preparatory program at an independent boarding and/or day school, along with a crash course in preparing for the boarding and/or day school. The program offers a wide variety of professional advancement, internships and study abroad opportunities for students. A diverse alumni network includes a host of Marshall, Fulbright, and Truman Scholars and students who have become leaders in a variety of fields including business, law, and medicine.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 2.** Prep for prep enrollment and graduation overview, October 2015

Ivy League institution	Enrolled	Graduated
Brown	14	100
Columbia	36	131
Cornell	21	88
Dartmouth	14	54
Harvard	22	174
University of Pennsylvania	28	155
Princeton	13	86
Yale	20	160

Source: Prep for Prep. 2016. "Independent School and College Enrollment." Accessed at: <http://www.prepforprep.org/podium/default.aspx?t=131601>

### Ivy League Institutions

A number of Ivy League institutions have welcomed students affiliated with the Upward Bound, A Better Chance, and Prep for Prep for numerous types of educational opportunities<sup>42</sup> In addition to these types of secondary school academic support and recruitment programs, Ivy League institutions have established recruitment programs of their own. Harvard offers an Undergraduate Minority recruitment program that offers resources to minority youths<sup>43</sup> Additionally, there is a growing movement to eliminate tuition for attending Harvard. However, no plans to do so are imminent.<sup>44</sup> Currently, students with family incomes of less than \$65,000 can attend free of charge at Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Princeton – a welcome development for ethnic minority and socioeconomically diverse families who are economically challenged. Families of Princeton students do not have to pay if family income is less than \$120,000.<sup>45 46 47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Prep for Prep. 2016. "The Prep Journey." Accessed at: <http://www.prepforprep.org/ourprogram>

<sup>42</sup> Richard L. Zweigenhaft, G. William Domhoff. 2003. *Blacks in the White Elite. Will the Progress Continue?* Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>43</sup> Harvard University. 2016. "Undergraduate Minority Recruitment Program." Accessed at: <https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/hear-our-students/multicultural-diversity>

<sup>44</sup> The Economist. 2016. "Yard Sale." March 26, 2016. Accessed at: <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21695548-colleges-big-endowments-face-calls-scrap-tuition-payments-yard-sale>.

<sup>45</sup> Harvard University. 2016. "Removing Economic Barriers to Harvard." Accessed at: <https://college.harvard.edu/financial-aid/how-aid-works/harvard-financial-aid-initiative>

<sup>46</sup> Stanford University. 2016. "How Aid Works." Accessed at: <http://financialaid.stanford.edu/undergrad/how/parent.html>

<sup>47</sup> Yale University. 2016. "Financial Aid in Depth." Accessed at: <http://admissions.yale.edu/financial-aid-prospective-students>

<sup>48</sup> Columbia University offers Opportunity and Academic Success Programs, and the Multicultural Recruitment Committee provides support, mentoring, and guidance to ethnic minority students.<sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> Brown University has an extensive “Institutional Diversity and Inclusion” initiative that includes a comprehensive plan for action, “Pathways to Diversity and Inclusion: An Action Plan for Brown University,” that strives to “establish a center for first generation students... support critical living and learning expenses for low-income undergraduate students... expand resources for centers that support students from diverse communities, expand mentoring programs, and establish a diversity and inclusion collective,” among many other initiatives.<sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup> Other colleges - the University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, and Dartmouth - also have generous support and financial aid plans.

## **Summary**

The United States has a variety of programs designed to improve the education of socioeconomically disadvantaged and ethnic minority youths. The Civil Rights reforms of the 1960s ensured that programs were started that could address the complex challenges faced by these youths, including re-segregation, continuing discrimination in educational tracking, and self-esteem and identity challenges in the academic environment among students of colour. Federally funded programs such as the Upward Bound program provide a way for students who might otherwise become disengaged with higher education to remain in the pipeline to pursue top colleges, while privately funded programs such as A Better Chance and Prep for Prep strive to place students in the higher echelons of academic institutions and Ivy League institutions with immersion college preparatory experience. All three programs have recorded substantial success with student having life transformational experiences and pursuing successful careers, and finding strength in alumni networks that have become powerful contributors in a host of professions in United States society. Finally, the Ivy League Institutions that support socioeconomically disadvantaged students have contributed significantly in the form of time, mentoring and support services, and making college affordable – particularly free of charge – for ethnic minorities.

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<sup>48</sup> Princeton University. 2016. “Who qualifies for aid?” Accessed at:

<https://admission.princeton.edu/financialaid/how-princetons-aid-program-works/who-qualifies-aid>

<sup>49</sup> Columbia University. 2016. “Multicultural Recruitment Committee.” Accessed at:

<https://undergrad.admissions.columbia.edu/learn/studentlife/diversity/mrc>

<sup>50</sup> Columbia Undergraduate Admissions, “Diversity of Resources.” Accessed at:

<https://undergrad.admissions.columbia.edu/learn/studentlife/diversity/resources>

<sup>51</sup> Brown University, 2016. Accessed at: <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/institutional-diversity/pathways>

<sup>52</sup> Brown University. 2016. “Pathways to Diversity and Inclusion: An Action Plan for Brown University,” February 1, 2016. Accessed at: <https://brown.edu/web/documents/diversity/actionplan/diap-full.pdf>

## **Summary and policy recommendations**

Based on the results of our research, we find that action is required at various levels. To truly increase BME student accessibility to Oxbridge Universities it is important to encourage change at the secondary school and university level. Moreover, it is also essential to balance and widen the general public debate on race and ethnicity at Oxford and Cambridge University.

Such changes would have the effect of reducing the gap of student access from different schools and greater information availability would help to change the common perception that Oxford is inaccessible. Such transformations would also help to improve the confidence levels of applicants to Oxbridge and would help to remove the psychological barrier that dissuades students from applying to Oxbridge.

We have grouped our recommendations at various levels of action to help increase accessibility to Oxford.

### **Immediate action at Oxford:**

- More outreach initiatives should specifically target state schools and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. To reach more BME students, outreach should take place beyond already existing connections to secondary schools. Links to colleges are a good way to go about this.
- Coaching and support in application and admissions processes should be offered to students from schools that are unable to do so. A tutoring model like the PQPM in France would be an interesting model.
- It also seems important to modify the Oxford image. The experiences and backgrounds of BME students need to become more visible, not just as tokens of diversity, but as a means of trying to address wide-spread fears of BME pupils about studying and living in Oxford.
- Support services for BME students at Oxford need to be improved. One way in which to address problems of accessibility for BME students, who are already at Oxford, would be to step up institutional support for student groups that tackle such issues and to appoint college staff that deal more specifically with problems experienced by BME students.

### **Immediate action beyond Oxford:**

- The university application support available to pupils at state schools needs to be extended and improved (not just for Oxbridge applications). Where schools are unable

to provide their pupils with the necessary support, universities or other organisations should step in to fill the gap.

- The current media coverage about the Oxbridge race helps to highlight this important issue. However, a one-sided depiction of Oxford as a racist institution and environment is neither helpful nor does it seem to be representative of the actual experiences of BME students at Oxford.

**Long-term solutions:**

- Investing into state schools to reduce the disparities between different types of secondary schools and improving the state education to widen the range of opportunities for all pupils at state schools would also present effective long-term approaches to ensure a more general equal access for all students.