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April 2016

## **Increasing Access to Oxbridge #2**

An exploration of obstacles for under-represented groups  
and efforts to overcome them

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**Report published**

April 30, 2016

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## Executive Summary

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This report seeks to explore the topic of accessibility to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the extent to which certain groups of people are under-represented. Students from low-income households, at state schools, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, of an ethnic minority, or with parents that have not been to university, often feel deterred from ever applying to the University of Oxford or Cambridge. Thus, we ask the question: why do students of various demographics or socio-economic backgrounds feel discouraged to apply to the 'Oxbridge' (Oxford and Cambridge) universities and what can be done to promote their access?

Our research suggests that the most important factors that influence pupils' university choices include the kind of school they attend, family and teachers, social and academic stigmas and costs. With regard to Oxbridge Universities specifically, applicants also seem to be intimidated by the complex and competitive application processes for the University of Oxford and Cambridge. This is an aspect that emerged from the results of a nation-wide OxPolicy survey conducted for this study and is reflected in existing literature.

Universities are currently pursuing two main avenues to overcome the problems of unequal access: outreach schemes and bursaries. Each technique attempts to address various aspects of group under-representation. Although both techniques have demonstrated some successes, they also have certain short-comings that will be analysed in this report.

The research gives rise to the following six policy proposals for Oxbridge universities in order to improve their efforts to widen access:

- Make the application process more standardized and transparent.
- Establish a less complex and more transparent bursary system.
- Provide financial support for poor students who live further away.
- Reach out to parents and teachers.
- Subsidize travel costs to outreach schemes that take place in Oxford.
- Conduct rigorous evaluations of efforts to widen access and publish them.

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## Introduction

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The universities of Oxford and Cambridge have historically experienced an under-representation of students from various disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds; students from state schools; students with parents that have not been to university; students from low-income households; and students of varied ethnic minorities. Although things have improved in recent years, access is still far from being equal.

Debates surrounding elitism at Oxbridge often hinge on the indicator of the state:private ratio of acceptances. Both universities now take more than half of their entrants from state run schools<sup>1</sup> and Cambridge has actually set a target of having at least 62% of its entrants from the state sector by 2016 (from 57% in 2011). While this data may at first be promising, it should be taken into consideration that the proportion of students attending independently run schools in the UK was only 6.5% in 2010.

With almost half of students from top public schools gaining places at Oxbridge Universities (Westminster and St Paul's Girls have 'hit rates' of 49.9% and 49% respectively – see source 1) it is perhaps unsurprising that there is so much controversy over diversity at these universities. Oxford and Cambridge are constantly reported as 'strenuously' arguing that they have a fair admissions system.<sup>2</sup> But even the fairest admissions system is not good enough if a large group of pupils does not even consider applying due to socio-economic factors.

### Why accessibility to Oxbridge matters

It is widely agreed that being in a diverse environment can improve an individual's success in terms of their ability to understand different people and different concepts, and also in their ability to respect and value other people.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, it could be said that Oxbridge Universities should work to improve access, at the very least for the sake of their students' education and well roundedness.

Oxford and Cambridge as institutions also want the best students who will do well on their chosen degrees, Oxford's website claiming that they strive for 'outstanding learning'.<sup>4</sup> However in the status quo they potentially miss out on some very bright and hard-working students from less privileged backgrounds who do not feel welcomed or simply can't afford to study in such expensive places.

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<sup>1</sup> Bolton, P. (2014) "Oxbridge 'elitism'." House of Commons Library. Retrieved from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22744/1/SN00616.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian (2013) "Controversy over class at Oxbridge is nothing new." Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/jun/09/oxford-cambridge-london-universities-diversity>

<sup>3</sup> Bucher, R. (2000) "Diversity Consciousness: Opening our minds to people, cultures, and opportunities." Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED438275>

<sup>4</sup> University of Oxford. "Finance and Funding." Retrieved from: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation/finance-and-funding?wssl=1>

Another perspective to consider the question from is that of meritocracy. America is known to be particularly proud of its meritocratic society<sup>5</sup> in which individuals are said to be able to advance their own prosperity through hard work and talent. Many respond to the emotional appeal of equality of opportunity, so that any individual from any background has the chance to succeed if they so wish. It is believed that this creates a better society. It is also argued that a meritocracy, and knowledge of opportunity, encourages individuals to work harder, benefitting not only themselves but the wider society.<sup>6</sup>

Arguably the strongest argument for widening access to Oxbridge is overcoming outdated classist structures in society. With Oxbridge being a catapult for success, accessibility to these institutions does not only deliver a good quality education to individuals, but has far ranging societal effects. Just under a quarter of Members of Parliament are Oxbridge educated, as are half of the country's diplomats, and three quarters of its senior judges.<sup>7</sup> Having in mind that these two institutions have such a big influence on who runs the state and the economy, it becomes clear that they should educate students from all parts of society and facilitate access for the less privileged in order to break the cycle of a ruling upper class and to live the values of equality and democracy.

### **The structure and purpose of this report**

Oxford and Cambridge already have many initiatives in place that are meant to widen access. These can be broadly divided into two groups, outreach work and bursaries. In 2013, Oxford spent twice as much on bursaries as it did on outreach activities (£9,000,000 as opposed to £4,500,000).<sup>8</sup> The wide range of efforts it makes include the UNIQ summer schools, the Pathways Programme and various bursaries and other forms of financial aid. This report will have a closer look at what is currently done, specifically in Oxford, evaluate whether it is successful, and suggest what can be improved.

While outreach activities might bring students into face to face contact with current students and tutors, bursaries can provide students with a degree of security and peace of mind. We must understand what is important to university applicants and thus in this report we also aim to explore reasons for students from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds for not actually making the application to Oxbridge.

As Oxford students, we will focus more on Oxford's exact systems and details, though much of what we cover applies to Cambridge too, as both universities have a very similar structure. We also focus on undergraduate admissions and UK citizens, as for postgraduate studies and international students, application procedures and structures are substantially different.

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<sup>5</sup> Sociation Today (2004) "The Meritocracy Myth." Retrieved from:  
<http://www.ncsociology.org/sociationtoday/v21/merit.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Wired. (2014) "Meritocracy: the workplace culture that breeds success." Retrieved from:  
<http://www.wired.com/insights/2014/10/meritocracy/>

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian (2016) "Education reform 'has failed to improve social mobility.'" Retrieved from:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/12/uk-education-reforms-not-helped-social-mobility>

<sup>8</sup> University of Oxford. "Office for Fair Access Agreement 2014-15." Retrieved from:  
<https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%202014-15.pdf>

Part I of this report provides some context to the debates at hand, including details about recent higher education reforms and the status quo of accessibility to Oxbridge. Part II explores potential reasons for unequal access and discusses current efforts to tackle the programme, divided into two big groups - outreach schemes and bursaries. Part III describes the methodology and results of a survey of pupils from disadvantaged schools conducted by this research team. Part IV offers key policies that can be put into practice by the University of Oxford (and Cambridge).

## Part I: Context

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### Major UK Higher Education reforms

The issue of financial support to higher education students in the UK has gained greater importance over the past few decades since 1962 when the government grants were implemented to meet students' tuition fees and maintenance costs. The system, which ran until replacement by means-tested student loans in 1990s, was created in junction in the development and diversification of higher education institutes (HEIs) in Britain to satisfy the growing need of qualified and well-trained human resource, and to equal access to higher education for all.<sup>9</sup> In the late 1980s, however, monies to students were gradually restricted and reduced by policies, and a shift from grants to loans emerged.

The early 2000s witnessed a resurgence of grants to groups for equality reasons. The most significant changes in financial support to students were introduced by the 2004 Higher Education Act and came into practice in 2006. The Act set university annual tuition fee to a cap of £3,000, promoted student loans, and provided packages of financial support to low-income students to compensate the impact of the increased fees on participation. The launch of financial assistance from higher education institutes marked a phenomenal change in the benefactors of most bursaries from the state to higher education providers. This also prompted a diversification in bursaries.

The more recent reforms in higher education funding and bursaries, the Coalition's reforms, which were drafted in the 2011 white paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*<sup>10</sup> and introduced in 2012/2013, cancelled universities teaching grants for most undergraduate courses, and encouraged HEIs to seek for income more from students' tuition fees and by other means such as voluntary donations. Therefore, a new maximum of annual tuition fees that HEIs could charge rose from £3,290 to £9,000. However, HEIs charging more than £6,000 must show the independent Director of Fair Access how they were going to attract students from low income, underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, as rise in university tuition fees is seen to have a negative impact on education participation. The Coalition also boosted the significance of institutional aid by setting up the National Scholarship Programme.

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, W. (1997) "Student grants, loans and tuition fees." House of Commons Library Research Paper 97/119.

<sup>10</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) "Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System." United Kingdom.



The next sections examine the two key reforms, the 2004 Higher Education Act and the 2011 Coalition's reforms, underlining their effects and implications, and the similarities and discrepancies between them.

### The 2004 Higher Education Act

The policy changes which started in 1990s signals the change in the government's answer to the question 'who should pay for higher education?' Aiming to reduce the public expenditure of HEIs, the Act significantly shifted the cost of higher education from the government and its taxpayers to the students and their families. The reform also bolstered the efforts of creating a HE quasi-market,<sup>11</sup> with a hope that the diversification of HEIs would increase.

Hence, the system of variable tuition fees with a cap of £3,000 was implemented. Simultaneously, a series of measures offsetting the negative impacts of growing fees on higher education enrolment and participation came into force, including the reappearance of means-tested maintenance grants and the launch of bursaries funded by higher education institutions.<sup>12</sup> The Office of Fair Access (OFFA) was also set in the Act to ensure that the increase in tuition fees would not impose a harmful effect on the participation.

Bursaries in the 2004 Act consisted of two types of bursaries, the mandatory bursaries and the non-mandatory bursaries. Mandatory bursaries were only paid to students receiving full maintenance grants from the government and paid by HEIs charging tuition fees over £2,700.<sup>13</sup> Hence, students from low income background could have their tuition fees fully covered by grants and bursaries. The criteria and amount of mandatory bursaries were set universally and unchanged by the government. However, more variations could be seen in the non-mandatory bursaries that were strongly encouraged by the government. Universities that chose to offer such kind of bursaries had the right to design the structure, selection, and value of the bursaries, including the amount of money allocated and the students eligible. Therefore, considerable disparities in the support offered by the HEIs emerged.

The scheme of bursaries proposed in the 2004 Act was seen by the government as a strong device to accomplish several different goals. Bursaries were first mentioned in in the government's 2003 *Widening Participation in Higher Education*.<sup>14</sup> They were regarded as a method of lowering the financial barriers to higher education participation, reducing student debt, promoting student choices, counterbalancing the negative impact of fee rise, and

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, R. (2013) "Access to Higher Education: The Shift towards Market-Based Policies in the UK." *Dice Report 11*(2): 23-27.

<sup>12</sup> Callender, C., and Wilkinson, D. (2013) "Student Perceptions of the Impact of Bursaries and Institutional Aid on their Higher Education Choices and the Implications for the National Scholarship Programme in England." *Journal of Social Policy 42*(02): 281-308.

<sup>13</sup> Callender, C. (2010) "Bursaries and Institutional Aid in Higher Education in England: Do They Safeguard and Promote Fair Access?" *Oxford Review of Education 36*(1): 45-62.

<sup>14</sup> Callender, C. (2010) "Bursaries and Institutional Aid in Higher Education in England: Do They Safeguard and Promote Fair Access?" *Oxford Review of Education 36*(1): 45-62.

notably, widening the access of higher education.<sup>15</sup> Altogether the government hoped that bursaries could help reducing the weight of finance as a factor when students choose courses and universities.

In the actual operation of the bursaries however, universities tended to use student support as a marketing strategy and for gaining a competitive position in the HE market.<sup>16</sup> They utilised institutional aids as means of attracting certain types of students, and developed various bursaries schemes. In 2006-2007, most HEIs were offering more than one bursary scheme.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to the expectation of the government, a large and complex systems of various bursaries practices emerged. It is worth pointing out that there was hardly any way that students could easily find information about different bursaries offered by various universities and compare them. Thus, students were possibly easily confused by the bulk information, or even could not find relevant information about their eligibility and the amount of money offered.<sup>18</sup>

A key issue in widening access to higher education is encouraging HEIs with less nice record of widening participation to do better. However, examinations on the consequences of the 2004 Act revealed that it actually perpetuated the inequalities and disparities of success in promoting participation of students from underrepresented background and low-income families between universities. In fact, HEIs with a good record in widening participation showed more efforts in promoting access.<sup>19</sup>

Another consequence of the emergence of complex bursary schemes was the differences in money actually given to the students of similar financial needs. For example, students studying at the most prestigious universities were given nearly three times more institutional aids than their peers at less prestigious HEIs.<sup>20</sup> The reason was due to the fact that the most prestigious HEIs had significantly fewer low-income students with needs of institutional aid. Hence students in similar need of bursaries could receive significantly different amounts of money according to the HEI they attended.

The 2004 Act was remarkable because it was the first time that government advocated the establishment of discretionary bursaries and institutional aids funded by universities, whereby it is the responsibility for the HEIs to provide financial aid to students and it is also the right for the HEIs to choose who their money goes to. It also stimulated more market-

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<sup>15</sup> Callender, C., and Wilkinson, D. (2013) "Student Perceptions of the Impact of Bursaries and Institutional Aid on their Higher Education Choices and the Implications for the National Scholarship Programme in England." *Journal of Social Policy* 42(02): 281-308.

<sup>16</sup> McCaig, C. (2009). "OFFA Access Agreements, bursaries and 'fair access' to higher education - opening up a new front in the WP wars?" BERA annual conference, Manchester, 2-5 September 2009. Retrieved from: <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/2386/>

<sup>17</sup> Callender, C. (2010). "Bursaries and Institutional Aid in Higher Education in England: Do They Safeguard and Promote Fair Access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36(1): 45-62.

<sup>18</sup> McCaig, C. (2009). "OFFA Access Agreements, bursaries and 'fair access' to higher education - opening up a new front in the WP wars?" BERA annual conference, Manchester, 2-5 September 2009. Retrieved from: <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/2386/>

<sup>19</sup> Callender, C. (2010). "Bursaries and Institutional Aid in Higher Education in England: Do They Safeguard and Promote Fair Access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36(1): 45-62.

<sup>20</sup> Callender, C. (2010). "Bursaries and Institutional Aid in Higher Education in England: Do They Safeguard and Promote Fair Access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36(1): 45-62.

oriented strategies adopted by universities. Hence, for the first time, students with distinctive needs in financial support started to be treated differently.

### The Coalition's reforms

The Coalition's reforms, outlined in the white paper *HIGHER EDUCATION: Students at the Heart of the System*,<sup>21</sup> acted to reduce HE expenditure and student support costs. Therefore, most teaching grants for undergraduate courses were abolished, and thus in order to keep the regular operations of universities, they had to gain comparable income through other means. Hence a new cap of annual tuition fee was set to £9,000, which was a significant rise from the £3,000 cap in the 2004 Act.

In 2012/2013, students from low-income background could still receive maintenance grants from the government. The mandatory bursaries were fully abolished, and universities were strongly encouraged by the government to provide more diverse schemes of financial support to students. A new National Scholarship Programme was founded in 2012, and all HEIs charging more than £6,000 automatically participated in the programme. These HEIs were expected to 'contribute additional funds from their own resource', 'offer a range of scholarship awards from a tuition charge waiver or discount, a free foundation year leading to a course with high entry requirements and progression to a professional career; discounted accommodation or other similar institutional service; and a financial scholarship/bursary up to £1,000'.<sup>22</sup> Hence, the diversity of bursaries and institutional aids among HEIs and the trend from universally set and fixed bursaries to discretionary institutional aids continued to prosper.

The Coalition's reforms, like the 2004 Act, were hoped to generate variations of tuition fees between universities, to promote the competition of the HE markets, and also to maintain and increase participation in higher education. In order to realise these goals, it was essential that students were well-informed of the bursaries and aids provided by HEIs and of their own eligibilities. Hence an effective provision of information was needed. Theoretically, students could gain information about government funded financial support easily from the 'student finances calculator' on the government website<sup>23</sup>. However, when it turned to the bursaries funded by individual universities, it is way harder for students to learn about detailed information of different types of financial support, let alone to compare the differences between them. In fact, most of the students have not received predictive or tailored knowledge about bursaries until they apply to certain courses at certain HEIs, or even until they start the course.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) "Higher Education. Students at the Heart of the System." United Kingdom.

<sup>22</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) "Higher Education. Students at the Heart of the System." United Kingdom.

<sup>23</sup> Callender, C., and Wilkinson, D. (2013) "Student Perceptions of the Impact of Bursaries and Institutional Aid on their Higher Education Choices and the Implications for the National Scholarship Programme in England. *Journal of Social Policy* 42(02): 281-308.

<sup>24</sup> Callender, C., and Wilkinson, D. (2013) "Student Perceptions of the Impact of Bursaries and Institutional Aid on their Higher Education Choices and the Implications for the National Scholarship Programme in England. *Journal of Social Policy* 42(02): 281-308.

Today the opaqueness and lack of accessibility to information about the bursaries still prevails. It can be argued that the new bursary system, at least the way it is applied by most HEIs, is not an efficient driver of university participation among students from low-income backgrounds.<sup>25</sup> The success of the recent big HE reforms is thus questionable. In the subsequent parts of this report we will have a closer look at how Oxbridge, specifically Oxford, fares within this new system and what the university can do to improve accessibility.

### **The continuing problem of accessibility to Oxbridge**

Oxford and Cambridge, the two most prestigious universities in the United Kingdom, both firmly maintain that they select students based solely on academic ability. However there is an entrenched tradition of able students originating from less advantaged backgrounds struggling to receive Oxbridge offers or not even applying at all. There has been a significant rise in concern over university admissions since tuition fees rose to £9,000 per year and the number of UK undergraduates admitted to Oxbridge has fallen recently (between the academic years 2006-06 and 2013-14, the number of undergraduates admitted to Oxford has fallen from 10,839 to 9,278).<sup>26</sup>

Oxford and Cambridge stress that their selection processes are fair and meritocratic and they advocate their outreach and access schemes, as well as the bursaries they offer to low-income students. Admissions data however still reveal an entrenched elitism. For example, despite an increase of 6% in the proportion of state educated pupils between the academic years of 2003-04 and 2013-14, pupils from the country's few prestigious independent institutions still comprise 2/5 of the intake at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>27</sup> To exceed their benchmark for 'disadvantaged pupils' Oxford would need to increase the percentage of state school admissions by 24%.<sup>28</sup> The next section will have a closer look on admissions statistics and potential reasons for the inequity.

#### **What is 'fair access'?**

The most common definition of 'fair' access is 'equal rates of making applications and receiving offers of admission from universities on the part of those who are equally qualified to enter them'.<sup>29</sup> Qualification is mainly measured by A-level attainment. Access has two components, being making an application and the receipt of an acceptance offer.

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<sup>25</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) "National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education." United Kingdom.

<sup>26</sup> The Sutton Trust, "Research Brief: Oxbridge Admissions." February 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/find-out-more/widening-participation> (accessed 18/04/2016)

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Boffey. "Oxford and Cambridge condemned over failure to improve state school access." The Guardian.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Boffey. "Oxford and Cambridge condemned over failure to improve state school access." The Guardian.

<sup>29</sup> V. Boliver, 'How Fair is access to more prestigious UK universities?' British Journal of Sociology, Vol 64: 2 (2013), 344.

## Status Quo in Oxford

The University of Oxford's Undergraduate Admissions Statistics website shows that 62.8% of the UK applicants from 2014 were from state schools, and 37.2% from independent schools.<sup>30</sup> Of those who were accepted, 56.3% were from state schools and 43.7% from independent schools. The University adds that nationally, although independent schools educate just 7% of the total UK school population, they account for 15% of all A-level entries, 30% of all A grades, and 33% of all those getting AAA. The website also offers guidance about extrapolating from the success rates of state school applicants compared with independent school applicants, which is affected by choice of subject:

UK domiciled state school students apply disproportionately for the most oversubscribed subjects. On average, 35% of UK domiciled state school applications between 2012 and 2014 were for the five most oversubscribed subjects at Oxford. This compared to just 30% of independent school applications.<sup>31</sup>

The five most oversubscribed subjects, with the highest applicant to places ratio between 2012 and 2014, were Economics and Management, Medicine, PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics), Law, and Physics. Between 2012 and 2014, there were 34,812 applications from students in the UK. 7,926 of these applications resulted in acceptance, giving a total acceptance rate of 23%. Of these, there were 21,036 applications in total from state schools, of varying school type; however, the University warns against examining specific school types in the UK (such as Academy, Comprehensive, and Grammar) as a 'crude and sometimes misleading indicator of disadvantage'.<sup>32</sup> Of this figure, there were 4,397 acceptances, leading to a total acceptance rate of 21%. There were 12,410 applications from independent school students, with 3,339 of these being given a place, leading to a total acceptance rate of 27%.<sup>33</sup> According to Sir Peter Lampl, chairman of the Sutton Trust, there had been improvements in state school admissions to Oxford and Cambridge in the past two decades: 'Over the last two decades we at the Sutton Trust have worked very closely with both Oxford and Cambridge to increase the proportion of state school students. This and other outreach initiatives have resulted in 20% more state school students.'<sup>34</sup> It is possible to see some improvement since 2007, in which there were 6,299 applications from state school

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<sup>30</sup> "University of Oxford Application Statistics". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014. Retrieved from: [https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO\\_UG\\_Admissons2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay\\_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissons2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no)

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Boffey. "Oxford and Cambridge condemned over failure to improve state school access." The Guardian.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Boffey. "Oxford and Cambridge condemned over failure to improve state school access." The Guardian.

<sup>33</sup> "University of Oxford Application Statistics". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014. Retrieved from: [https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO\\_UG\\_Admissons2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay\\_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissons2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no)

<sup>34</sup> Weale, Sally. "David Cameron's Oxford college admits fewest state school applicants". The Sutton Trust. Retrieved from: <http://www.suttontrust.com/david-camerons-oxford-college-admits-fewest-state-school-applicants/>

students; in 2013 there were 6,974 applicants, 7,181 applicants in 2012, and 7,586 in 2010.<sup>35</sup> The acceptance rate remains around the 20% mark, with between 1,400 and 1,500 state school students being accepted; interestingly, the acceptance rate of students from independent schools was at 32% in 2007, falling steadily to 27% in the four years between 2011 and 2014.<sup>36</sup>

According to the University website which offers information about the number of applicants from different regions in the UK, applications are broken down by school type (state, independent, other), although it is necessary to remember that the regions have varying population sizes and varying numbers of school type.<sup>37</sup> Overall, a vast majority of applications were from students in Greater London - 7,825 - which translated into 1,842 acceptances, an acceptance rate of 24%. This was the same rate as for the South East, which had 7,621 applicants who received 1,852 acceptances. The North East also had an acceptance rate of 24%, with 172 of its 718 applicants being accepted. The highest acceptance rate was in the Eastern region of the UK: 832 of the 3,259 applicants were given places, leading to an acceptance rate of 26%. The very lowest acceptance rates were from Scotland and Northern Ireland, both at 19%, and Wales, at 17%. From Wales, 210 of the 1,220 applicants were accepted, while from Scotland there were 165 acceptances out of 850 applicants, and for Northern Ireland 68 acceptances out of 357 applicants.

Comparative data about the potential applicant pool for Oxford in each region is also available, according to the University website: 'This is based on data from 2009-2012, for those who applied to university through UCAS, from schools within each region, and achieved AAA+ at A-level, or 38+ IB points, averaged over the 4 year period.'<sup>38</sup> In Greater London this pool consists of 20,039 students, giving a percentage of 39%, meaning that 39% of the students with AAA+ applied to Oxford; in the South East this pool is 25,857 students, putting the percentage at 29.5%. The lowest percentage was 5.8%, from Northern Ireland: the potential applicant pool was 6,125 students, with only 357 applying. The total number of potential applicants is given as 121,691 students, meaning that 28.6% of potential applicants ultimately applied to Oxford. These figures cannot be applied to Scotland, however, as the majority of students take Scottish Highers rather than A Level exams. In terms of breakdown by school type, the total acceptance rate for independent schools is higher, at 27%, while state schools is 21% and other school types is 14%. There is, however, a vast difference in figures as 21,036 state school students applied and 4,397 were accepted; 12,410 independent school students applied and 3,339 were accepted; 1,366 students from other school types applied and 190 were accepted. The biggest disparity in percentages exists in Greater London, where 19% of state school applicants were accepted - 658 of 3,512

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<sup>35</sup> "University of Oxford Application Statistics". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014. Retrieved from: [https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO\\_UG\\_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay\\_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no)

<sup>36</sup> "University of Oxford Application Statistics". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014. Retrieved from: [https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO\\_UG\\_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay\\_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no)

<sup>37</sup> All figures in this paragraph are retrieved from: "University of Oxford Application Statistics". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014. Retrieved from: [https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO\\_UG\\_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay\\_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no)

<sup>38</sup> All figures in this paragraph are retrieved from: "University of Oxford Application Statistics". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014.

applicants - compared to 29% of independent school applicants - 1,126 of 3,903 applicants. In the East Midlands the acceptance rate was 20% for both state and independent applicants.

The college system is unique to Oxbridge, with applicants being able to choose to apply to a specific college or make an open application. Most colleges offer most courses. 73.3% of the applicants for 2014 entry were accepted into their first choice college, but there is also a redistribution process between the colleges. According to the University website,

Any given college will reallocate a certain number of the candidates who named it as their preference to other colleges, and will have candidates for consideration who named another college as their preference reallocated to them. This capacity by colleges to share and consider a wide range of candidates helps ensure the best applicants across the University get places, regardless of whether the particular college they named as their preference was oversubscribed in that year.<sup>39</sup>

In 2014, 3,144 candidates submitted open applications, whereby the applicants did not specify a preferred college, which constituted 18% of the total applicants. Acceptance rates vary from college to college, as colleges are both under- and over-subscribed every year. Brasenose's acceptance rate is at 12%, accepting 281 of its 2,334 applicants 2012-2014; Worcester also has a low acceptance rate of 15%, accepting 306 out of 2,095 applicants. St. Hilda's has an acceptance rate of 35%, accepting 276 of its 783 applicants' St. Hugh's acceptance rate is also high, at 32%, accepting 291 of its 897 applicants. Variations in success rates are affected by the number of applicants to any college in a given year, the number of applicants for any course in a given year, and the number of strong candidates being 'exported' and 'imported' by any college in a given year. The Sutton Trust has described the application process, with over thirty colleges for students to choose from, as 'intimidating and complex', and likely to deter bright pupils from state schools from applying.<sup>40</sup>

The Office for Fair Access has access agreements with institutions which set out how they will sustain or improve access and student success, which includes retention, attainment and employability. The access agreement sets out factors including: the proposed tuition fee limits; the access and student success measures which will be put in place; and targets and milestones.<sup>41</sup> The University of Oxford sets out its acceptance rates on the University website: of the 2,585 students accepted from the UK in 2014, 551 were from schools targeted by the Access Agreement in which schools where 30 or fewer students achieved AAA+ at A Level over a 3-year period and have a limited historical success in having

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<sup>39</sup> "Applications by College". Undergraduate Admissions Statistics 2014. Retrieved from: [https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO\\_UG\\_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay\\_count=y&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions2/AcceptanceRate?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=y&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no)

<sup>40</sup> Sellgren, Kathering. "Oxbridge college admissions 'complex and intimidating'." The Sutton Trust. Retrieved from: <http://www.suttontrust.com/oxbridge-college-admissions-complex-and-intimidating/>

<sup>41</sup> For more information see OFFA Website: <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/introducing-access-agreements/#sthash.1JhaaUm2.dpuf>

successful Oxford candidates. The target is to have 25% of candidates coming from this group by 2016-17; currently the rate is 21.3%.<sup>42</sup>

The University is also targeting candidates from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, measured by their ACORN (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods) postcode, focusing on ACORN postcodes 4 ('moderate means') and 5 ('hard pressed'), the least advantaged areas of the UK. The target is to increase the proportion of candidates from these areas to 9% by 2016-17.<sup>43</sup> The total number of UK applicants matched with ACORN data in 2014 entry was 2,579; 241 students were accepted from ACORN postcodes 4 and 5, putting the acceptance rate at 9.3%. The final low participation target category is POLAR 2 (Participation of Local Areas) which looks at the participation of young people in higher education for different geographical areas of the UK, and shows how the chances of young people entering higher education varies depending on where they live. Oxford is focusing on quintiles 1 and 2, which have the lowest participation rates in higher education. In 2014, the total number of accepted UK applicants who matched with POLAR 2 postcode data was 2,560, with 264 students accepted from POLAR 2 quintile 1 and 2 postcodes, putting the percentage of accepted students at 10.3%; the target is to increase this to 13% by 2016-17.

## **Part II: Reasons for unequal access and attempts to overcome them**

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### **Reasons for unequal access to Oxbridge**

#### **Types of school**

The type of school is a major factor influencing a prospective student's chances of accessing Oxford and Cambridge. Many of the factors constituting unequal access do feed back into the factor of school type as within our society, type of school largely determines academic prospects and opportunities. The type of school you attend, whether a privately funded school or a state school, comprehensive or grammar school, shapes your behaviours and attitudes towards university application and also your access to top universities. Evidence from the Sutton Trust report reveals that three prestigious private schools and two elite sixth form colleges produced as many entrants to Oxford and Cambridge as 1800 state schools and colleges across England, in 2011-12.<sup>44</sup> The report also shows that in 2012/13 over 1600 schools failed to send any pupils to Oxbridge.<sup>45</sup> These statistics show how far your school type directly determines how likely it is that you will apply and receive an offer to more prestigious universities. Public schools are very expensive and are thus out of reach for many very bright but less privileged students thus directly affecting their academic and university prospects.

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<sup>42</sup> University of Oxford website. "Access Agreement target categories." Retrieved from: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate/additional-info/access-agreement-target-categories?wssl=1>

<sup>43</sup> All figures for this paragraph are retrieved from: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate/additional-info/access-agreement-target-categories?wssl=1>

<sup>44</sup> The Sutton Trust. "Research Brief: Oxbridge Admissions." February 2016. University of Cambridge. Retrieved from: <http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/find-out-more/widening-participation>

<sup>45</sup> The Sutton Trust. "Research Brief: Oxbridge Admissions." February 2016. University of Cambridge. Retrieved from: <http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/find-out-more/widening-participation>



A 2005 survey about the factors affecting applications to Oxford and Cambridge also underlines that state school applicants are more likely to apply for over-subscribed subjects, and are less likely to apply for those least subscribed subjects which thus affects the likelihood of these state applicants receiving offers.<sup>46</sup> This essentially represents a problem in access to information. It appears as though school type dictates the amount of exposure and access students have to the application processes, the subject choices at Oxbridge. Private school students are much more likely to receive regular 'Oxbridge sessions' and advice and updates from teachers and the school itself, whereas state schools provide the essential university knowledge but lack a specific Oxbridge focus in terms of their higher education advice and resources. The same survey also identifies that teachers at grammar schools reported that a higher number of their students apply to Oxbridge, receive offers and gain places than teachers from comprehensive schools. The evidence presented from the survey shows that comprehensive schools were less likely to offer some of the support mechanisms available to students at grammar schools or private schools, such as advice on choosing colleges, visits from Oxford or Cambridge representatives and mock interviews. This thus presents a further issue: the discrepancy within the state school structure itself, between comprehensive schools and grammar schools. Therefore it is clear how far the type of school defines access to Oxbridge.

### **Access to information**

As highlighted in the previous section, access to information about Oxbridge, which is to a large extent determined by your school type, is a major obstacle which can prevent state school applicants to top universities. Figure 1 shows students' views on the effectiveness of sources of information about Oxford and Cambridge from a survey completed in 2004. The table shows that in that year, students identified the university websites, open day visits and shadowing schemes as the most useful channels in providing information about Oxbridge. This shows a clear preference for digital formats and physical visits over traditional sources of information such as university prospectuses. However, despite the identified preferred sources of information, 465 students surveyed argued that there was a lack of information surrounding courses, departments and colleges at Oxbridge. This lack of information publicised through websites or prospectuses thus puts state school students at a disadvantage as their opportunities for day visits and shadowing schemes, although is increasing under recent university schemes such as Target Schools (Oxford University), are still limited compared to private schools. This is because due to the information gap between Oxbridge and state schools, information about these open days and shadowing schemes are not promoted through state schools as much they are in private schools. This lack of information is a key factor in unequal access to Oxbridge as it is filtered through the state school -private school divide with the state schools receiving the least amount of information.

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<sup>46</sup> Kate Ridely, et al. (2005) "Factors Affecting Applications to Oxford and Cambridge - Repeat Survey."

**Figure 1:** Students' views on the usefulness of sources of information about the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, 2005

Source of information:	N	Very useful %	Useful %	Not useful %	Not at all useful %
UCAS website	458	25	57	15	2
UCAS handbook	130	21	55	18	5
Oxford or Cambridge University prospectus	648	57	39	3	0
Oxford or Cambridge Departmental prospectus	421	56	39	4	0
Oxford or Cambridge College prospectus	399	48	44	6	1
Oxford or Cambridge website	531	45	49	4	0
Open day visit	392	75	21	3	1
Visit organised by school	214	67	25	5	1
Visit organised by student	193	62	34	2	1
Higher Education fair	363	13	44	33	8
Information for ethnic minorities	17	29	35	24	12
League tables	435	23	55	18	3
Visits from Oxford and Cambridge staff	173	34	48	16	2
Oxford or Cambridge student visiting school	206	37	47	14	2
Oxford and Cambridge regional conference	140	45	38	12	4
Shadowing scheme	19	79	16	0	5
Summer school	34	82	12	3	3
Other HE prospectus	125	39	46	14	1
Other	45	39	46	14	1

Source: Kate Ridely, et al. (2005) "Factors Affecting Applications to Oxford and Cambridge - Repeat Survey." p. 15.

### Social and academic stigma

Common perceptions about the prestige and elitism of Oxford acts as a deterrent for many state school prospective applicants. The prestige of the university and anxiety about the application process combined with the fear of failure are identified by frequent reports as pivotal factors that discourage students to apply to Oxbridge.<sup>47</sup> A 2005 questionnaire given to 906 students from a range of schools across Britain pointed to the prestige of Oxbridge (26%) and its good academic reputation (24%) as the key perceptions of the universities.<sup>48</sup> Social and academic stigmas surrounding Oxbridge seem to prevent state school students from applying as they believe they would be isolated in an alien social culture and that they wouldn't be able to exceed the high grade requirements. Figure 2 from a report in 2005 provides an outline of main reasons that dissuade state school applicants from applying to Oxbridge. The issue of social and academic stigma arises from this evidence. This report by Ridely et al. (2005) underlines that out of a questionnaire given to teachers, 41% argued that

<sup>47</sup> Kate Ridely, et al. (2005) "Factors Affecting Applications to Oxford and Cambridge - Repeat Survey."

<sup>48</sup> Kate Ridely, et al. (2005) "Factors Affecting Applications to Oxford and Cambridge - Repeat Survey."

students were discouraged from applying to Oxbridge due to fears that they would struggle in the social environment and 45% believed that students faced a lack of confidence in their academic ability and ability to cope with the workload at these universities. Evidence from the report suggests that as a result of entrenched myths about Oxbridge, state school students believe that at these universities they would be alienated and isolated in the university culture and that the entry requirements were too high. High achievers at state schools are deterred from applying to Oxbridge due to perceptions of social stigma and class barriers. Teachers also cite a common under-estimation of one's own academic ability, a fundamental lack of confidence, especially amongst state school students. The academic pressure and atmosphere seems to deter many state school prospective applicants from applying to Oxbridge. Lack of confidence in academic ability and the social stigma of Oxbridge amongst many state school students factors largely as a deterrent. There is a trend of a lack of aspiration and confidence amongst state school students informed by social and academic perceptions of Oxford and Cambridge as elitist universities.

**Figure 2:** Knowledge about selection procedures at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, 2005

		% of teachers within school type			Overall % of teachers
		Comp.	Grammar	Post-16	
Uncomfortable in the social context	Often discouraged	54	23	46	42
	Occasionally	45	70	48	54
	Never	1	8	6	4
Course/subject not available	Often discouraged	15	20	15	17
	Occasionally	61	73	75	69
	Never	24	6	10	14
Attitude of family/friends	Often discouraged	15	9	19	14
	Occasionally	56	46	60	54
	Never	29	45	21	32
Cost	Often discouraged	20	9	8	13
	Occasionally	61	43	58	54
	Never	19	49	35	33
Earlier closing dates for UCAS	Often discouraged	4	5	4	4
	Occasionally	42	31	65	43
	Never	54	64	31	52

Source: Kate Ridely, et al. (2005) "Factors Affecting Applications to Oxford and Cambridge - Repeat Survey." p. 15.

### Costs

Costs are seen as a very important factor for pupils (and their families) when it comes to choosing whether to apply to university. Especially after the recent higher education reforms that saw a rise of annual fees to £9,000, taking out a loan has become a quasi-obligation for most students who do not have the privilege of coming from a rich family. Debt puts a big burden on them and especially those who come from non-academic backgrounds might not see why a university education could be worth it. Oxford and Cambridge are especially

expensive, as these cities are regularly ranked as the most unaffordable places in the country.<sup>49</sup>

## Initiatives by the University of Oxford to widen access

### Outreach activities

Most generally, access and outreach campaigns aim to attract applications from all individuals with the potential to study at Oxford, but traditionally these are aimed towards students from backgrounds that have been historically under-represented and equipping them with the capacity to make competitive applications. The majority of access schemes rely upon improving access to information – including that relating to the course, selection process, finances, and the relevant support available whilst at Oxford. The main challenge is stated to be in ‘encouraging students from disadvantaged groups to apply to Oxford and in helping them to make successful applications.’<sup>50</sup>

In 2016-7, a budgeted £6.15 million is estimated to be spent on access and outreach initiatives, although a total of £13.8 million is estimated to be spent when non-access initiatives are included<sup>51</sup>; given such an economic cost, it is imperative that their success is evaluated. The reach of schemes has been expanding in recent years: in 2013-4 Oxford conducted over 3,200 access and outreach activities involving 3,600 schools and colleges in the UK; a 35% increase from 2011-12, the year in which the regional link programme was implemented, perhaps highlighting the importance of college-specific initiatives.<sup>52</sup>

Oxford’s access schemes work under several targets, set in 2010-11 to be evaluated in 2016-7; these targets can help assess the outcomes of access initiatives and admission policies against the university’s aims. These involve:

- Increasing the percentage of UK undergraduate students from schools and colleges with historically limited progression to Oxford to 25%
- Increasing the percentage from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (measured by ACORN postcodes 4 and 5) to 9%
- Increasing the percentage from neighbourhoods with low participation in higher education (measured by POLAR 3 postcodes 1 and 2) by 13%

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<sup>49</sup> Carter, A. “Why are the UK’s 10 most unaffordable areas to live so expensive?” The Guardian. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2014/nov/04/uk-10-most-unaffordable-areas-centre-for-cities>

<sup>50</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17.” Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17.” Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>, p. 4, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17.” Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

- Meeting the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) benchmark on undergraduate students with declared disabilities or specific learning differences.<sup>53</sup>

Although it is noted that the impact of the increased access and outreach schemes will take some time to show in the admissions statistics, in 2015 Oxford has already met the 5 year target relating to the proportion of admitted students from the two most disadvantaged ACORN quintiles (4 and 5) and the HSE benchmark level for students with identified disabilities, and progress has been made on all other targets compared to 2010 levels.<sup>54</sup> Some of the main campaigns in which Oxford works to achieve these targets are outlined below.

#### UNIQ Summer School (from 2010)<sup>55</sup>

The UNIQ summer school is a free summer course held at various Oxford colleges, with the food, accommodation, and course fee funded internally by each college. The campaign aims to bring together high achieving and capable sixth form students to Oxford to engage in a week-long ‘summer school,’ including an insight into lectures and the study system at Oxford and the social aspects of university. Based on the Sutton Trust summer schools held since 1997, the Oxford-wide campaign is one of the largest and most targeted at Oxford, bringing together undergraduate admissions and outreach, colleges, departments, facilities, and undergraduate students.

The process works with the sixth form students making a direct application to the summer school of their chosen subject. Although theoretically any state school student can apply, the admissions are selected on the basis of contextual and academic information in order to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have the greatest opportunity. This is assessed under several factors, including relative academic performance in comparison to school and local area average, and other socio-economic factors relating to ACORN and POLAR 3 post code groups; socio-economic background or from a local area, school or family background with a history of low progression to higher education. Research suggests that they are particularly valuable for students with academic achievements and aspirations above those in their peer group.

The campaign is popular – with around 800-1,000 students for all subjects. Overall, evaluative studies of the scheme suggest that it is successful in its access aims in 2014, 98.3% of students came from one or more target groups for access and outreach work, which include<sup>56</sup>:

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<sup>53</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17.” Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17.” Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> For more information see UNIQ website of the University of Oxford: [www.uniq.ox.ac.uk](http://www.uniq.ox.ac.uk)

<sup>56</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17”. Retrieved from:

- ACORN groups 4 and 5; POLAR 3 groups 1 and 2; schools with a history of low progression to Oxbridge
- Schools with below average GCSE attainment; looked after children; household income of less than £35,000
- Black or minority ethnic
- No parental experience of higher education.

Furthermore, in 2014, out of 1,001 students who attended the UNIQ summer school, 66% went on to apply to Oxford, and 38% were given a place, in comparison to an average success rate of 20.1% for the university as a whole. This is however at least partly due to the preselection of the summer school application. Out of those who attended the summer school and received an offer, 20.6% attended schools with low experience of students attaining AAA at A-Level; 22.6% were from ACORN 4 and 5 postcodes; 26.6% lived in POLAR 1 and 2 areas; and 90.9% came from schools with little history of successful Oxford applications.<sup>57</sup>

Despite this, some non-academic limitations may still remain. The campaign relies on individuals independently making applications to the UNIQ summer school, and thus may be limited in potentially excluding students that experience non-academic barriers to Oxbridge, including the role of myths around Oxford as a university and relating to ‘traditional’ Oxford students. It also makes assumptions about the absence of information barriers. Students cannot apply if they lack information about the scheme, and this may be a particular barrier for students at disadvantaged schools that cannot rely on teachers to provide such information and encouragement. Unfortunately, evaluations are limited since one can only evaluate the backgrounds of the students who have already applied to and attended the scheme. In order to review barriers that may persist whilst at university, UNIQ aims to track participant progression against control groups to undertake a fuller evaluation, but this is in its early stages.

#### Pathways Programme (from 2013)<sup>58</sup>

The Pathways Programme is a more long-term outreach initiative, extending between school years 10 and 13, with most participating students being engaged in the programme in year 10, then followed up at subsequent year-specific activities until year 13. During year 10, students will be involved in taster days as an introduction to higher education; by year 11, this will progress to ‘investigating options’ days aimed at highlighting the importance of GCSE options and post-15 subject choices, whilst also providing both general and subject-specific information relevant to GCSE students. In year 12, as the students transition into sixth form, they are given the opportunity to participate in academic ‘study days’ run by Oxford tutors and accompanied by undergraduate students, including admissions information. By year 13, students will attend an application information day aimed at

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<https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17.” Retrieved from:

<https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> For more information see Oxford Pathways website at: [www.pathways.ox.ac.uk](http://www.pathways.ox.ac.uk)

providing more specific information on Oxford admissions, including a mock interview and interview workshops to enable the students to make competitive applications. Applications to the events are made by schools, which select their most academically able students to attend. All events are held in Oxford and are free to attend. Although travel reimbursement is not offered, free overnight accommodation is provided for those living far away.

The scheme is targeted at non-selective state schools, particularly those with little history of engagement and successful progression to Oxford. In terms of the students that are selected, the selection process takes into consideration academic achievement, in addition to socio-economic data such as parental higher education participation, parental eligibility for state benefits, and the student's eligibility for free school meals (FSMs). It also provides information to staff members, enabling non-selective students from the school to benefit somewhat. In 2013, the campaign engaged 2,500 students and 350 teachers from 470 schools.<sup>59</sup>

From those that participated in the year 13 activities in 2013, around 80% made an application to Oxford. Out of these, 26% received offers, in comparison to the Oxford-wide average of 20.1%<sup>60</sup>, suggesting that the scheme is successful in encouraging applications to Oxford (although of course this may be biased, since those more likely to engage in the scheme may already be interested in applying) in addition to equipping the students with the ability to make competitive applications, as demonstrated by the greater than average success rate.

Again, the scheme continues to have some limitations, since it makes assumptions about access to information for teachers and schools, and relies upon school initiative and motivation to make the application. It is likely that many disadvantaged schools, which may already suffer due to a lack of teacher knowledge and information about university admissions processes (both generally and Oxford-specific), will be excluded here. Furthermore, schools with limited or no history of successful Oxford applications may lack any motivation to consider applying at all. The scheme may also be limited in geographical terms: it is likely that geographical distance from the events held in Oxford may present a barrier. In particular, if travel reimbursements are not made, the scheme depends firstly on the ability, and secondly on the motivation or willingness of families to pay for travel (which can be substantial over long distances in the UK). This may inadvertently exclude the most socioeconomically disadvantaged students, whose families may be unable to afford substantial travel costs, whilst also excluding those from families who place less value on the importance of university or Oxbridge, for example, those with no experience of attending university themselves, who may see more value in post-16 or post-18 work due to their own background. This is itself exacerbated by the fact that the counties surrounding Oxford tend to be relatively middle class with good advancement to higher education, whilst Northern counties, and areas in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, are relatively under-represented at Oxford.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For more information see Oxford Pathways website at: [www.pathways.ox.ac.uk](http://www.pathways.ox.ac.uk)

<sup>60</sup> University of Oxford. "University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17." Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> University of Oxford, "University of Oxford Undergraduate Admissions Statistics: 2013 entry." Retrieved from:

## Target Schools<sup>62</sup>

It is important to note that Target Schools is not run directly by the university itself, but is student-run and affiliated with the Oxford University Student Union (OUSU). However, since it is OUSU's flagship access and outreach campaign, it is important enough to be included here. The campaign works by the student-run committee directly contacting schools around the UK based on socio-economic factors, such as little history of access and progression to Oxford or higher education. Following this, schools will independently select some of their most academically able Year 12 students to visit Oxford to shadow an undergraduate throughout the day, in addition to attending college tours and workshops providing information on life at Oxford and the application process. It aims to 'debunk myths' by showing students what studying at Oxford would really be like, in addition to fostering their motivation and capacity to make a competitive application by providing them access to information.

Although the event is free and includes a college-provided lunch, travel is not reimbursed, and it does require students to be available at Oxford from before 9am. In 2013-4, 120 participants from various schools were involved. In addition to this, Target Schools runs an annual 'road show' that involves a group of Oxford undergraduates visiting targeted schools directly, in order to provide information on life at Oxford and the application process to a range of school years. The show tends to travel to Northern areas or regions with a history of traditionally low progression to Oxford.

This scheme suffers from similar limitations as outlined above, mainly the inability to reimburse travel or overnight accommodation costs, and the barriers presented by geographical location. However, Target Schools has an advantage where many other schemes do not, in the sense that they actively target disadvantaged schools which would most benefit from the scheme, which may help in overcoming some of the barriers relating to information access. The road show is also likely to go far in removing some of the barriers associated with geographical location and distance.

## Other

From 2011, Oxford launched its regional link programme<sup>63</sup>, which links each Oxford College with a local authority in the UK, to which the college targets access events (both within and outside of Oxford). This enables colleges to be more specific in their focus, in addition to ensuring that access strategies do not over-target local areas closer to Oxford, but has limitations in terms of the variability of financial and other commitment of different colleges to access. This is exacerbated by the fact that different Oxford colleges hold different

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[http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/gazette/documents/statisticalinformation/admissionsstatistics/Admissions\\_Statistics\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/gazette/documents/statisticalinformation/admissionsstatistics/Admissions_Statistics_2013.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> For more information see the Target Schools website of the OUSU at: [www.targetschools.ousu.org](http://www.targetschools.ousu.org)

<sup>63</sup> For more information see the "Link colleges" page of the University of Oxford website at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/supporting-an-applicant/resources-teachers/link-colleges>



degrees of wealth, yet the financial ability for each college to invest in access is not considered when a college is linked with UK regions with different levels of advantage in terms of access to Oxbridge. For example St John's, Oxford's wealthiest (undergraduate) college by assets per student<sup>64</sup>, is linked to already prosperous regions in the country, such as Ealing in London which has been proclaimed as an 'up and coming sweet spot'<sup>65</sup> with house prices there being almost twice the UK average<sup>66</sup>.

In addition to the longer term schemes, Oxford also runs a large variety of single day schemes, such as student conferences in a few locations around the UK, open days at Oxford, UCAS Higher Education Conventions, which also target teachers outside Oxford, and other teacher-specific campaigns.<sup>67</sup> Teacher-specific campaigns in particular offer information on admissions processes and advise teachers on how best to identify, nurture, and support academically able students, equipping them with the capacity to overcome some of the other limitations associated with variation between schools. Other campaigns, such as online and social media strategies, tend to be primarily student-run rather than directly overseen by the university.

## **Bursaries and other financial support**

### **Tuition and maintenance support<sup>68</sup>**

There are different kinds of financial support offered by the UK government for undergraduates wishing to attend university. The government offers financial assistance in the form of tuition fee loans, maintenance loans and maintenance grants to undergraduate students. Tuition fees are in fact dependent on the household income of the student in question. Household income is assessed based on gross taxable income for the last full tax year and includes the income of the student added to that of parent/step-parent/partner. For the academic year starting in 2016, income from the 2014-15 tax year is used.

Students can access a tuition fee loan from the UK government for the whole amount. For instance, if the household income of the student is £25,001 and above, the tuition fee for the student for 2015 was £9,000, which progressively decreases to a tuition fee of £6,000 for a household income of £16,000 or less. Generally, financial assistance of this nature is offered to students from UK and the EU.

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<sup>64</sup> University of Oxford. "Financial Statements of the Oxford Colleges (2014-15)." Retrieved from: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation/finance-and-funding/financial-statements-of-the-Oxford-Colleges-2014-15?wssl=1>

<sup>65</sup> The Telegraph. (2015) "The new map of middle class London." Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/property/11485833/The-new-map-of-middle-class-London.html>

<sup>66</sup> BBC NEWS. (2015) "UK house prices up 6.1%, says ONS." Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-34842248>

<sup>67</sup> University of Oxford. "University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2016-17." Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%201617%20amended%20December%202015.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> University of Oxford. "Government Support." Retrieved from: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/ug-funding/government-support>

In addition to tuition fee support, students can request funding for living costs. Students can access maintenance loans on the basis of household income and additional maintenance support if the student is from a lower-income household. For students from England, Northern Ireland and Scotland who started from 2012, a tuition fee loan of up to £9,000 per year and maintenance loan (which is repayable) and maintenance grant (which is non-repayable) for living costs calculated based on the household income is available. For students from Wales who started from 2012, for a fee of up to £9,000, a tuition fee loan of £3,810 and a tuition fee grant up to £5,190 for the remainder of the fee is provided. Maintenance loans and grants are also granted according to the household income of the student differentially in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For instance, for a student from England, a maintenance loan of £4,047 and maintenance grant of £3,387 for a household income of up to £25,000 is provided, which is modified to a maintenance loan of £3,731 and no maintenance grant for a household income of £62,143 and above.

Students from the UK are also entitled to receive additional assistance on the basis of disability or having dependents which are assessed on need and household income respectively. Examples of funds disbursing these, expenses include Disabled Students' Allowances, Parents' Learning Allowance, Childcare Grant, etc.

## Bursaries

Bursaries include financial assistance made to students on the basis of financial need and are funded by universities primarily from the additional income gained from the introduction of variable tuition.<sup>69</sup>

The post-2006 bursaries may be broadly divided into four categories<sup>70</sup>:

1. Means-tested, which is perhaps the most common kind of bursary. The means test itself also varies, sometimes to the point that a small minority of universities offer universal bursaries, effectively discounting tuition fees for all students;
2. Geographical, which is offered to students living near the university, from low participation neighbourhoods. This type of bursaries is criticized on the basis that they are designed to strengthen universities' supply chains<sup>71</sup>;
3. Group-based, which is targeted at groups felt to be under-represented in the university's student body, including mature students, disabled students and those from minority ethnic communities;
4. Academic, which are accompanied by criteria aimed to attract high achievers or those awarded to students who meet academic targets during their studies. This type of bursaries has been criticized on the basis that they aim to address the corporate realities of strong students by boosting recruitment of strong students.

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<sup>69</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>70</sup> Neil Harrison and Sue Hatt (2012) "Expensive and failing? The role of student bursaries in widening participation and fair access in England." *Studies in Higher Education* 37 (6): 695-712.

<sup>71</sup> Neil Harrison and Sue Hatt (2012) "Expensive and failing? The role of student bursaries in widening participation and fair access in England." *Studies in Higher Education* 37 (6): 695-712.

At the time they were introduced, bursaries were considered to have multiple objectives: a policy device for overcoming student participation in higher education<sup>72</sup>; help reduce student debt and promote student choice<sup>73</sup>; minimize the impact of higher tuition fees on access and participation<sup>74</sup>; and promote widening participation and to safeguard and promote access to higher education.<sup>75</sup> The most pressing concern articulated at the time of introduction of bursaries was that universities with large proportions of low-income students, i.e. the likely least prestigious institutions, would have to pay out more in mandatory bursaries than HEIs with more affluent students, i.e. the likely most prestigious institutions. Consequently, the former group of institutions would generate less revenue from variable tuition fees and have fewer resources to allocate to non-mandatory bursaries and scholarships.<sup>76</sup> There was also the expectation that universities with a smaller proportion of low-income students were expected to offer more financial support than those universities with a higher proportion of low-income students. This confirms the understanding that at the very least, there is substantial variation offered by different universities which would likely result in students from similar financial situations being treated differently depending on the university they attend.<sup>77</sup>

### Bursaries offered by the University of Oxford<sup>78</sup>

In 2014-15, Oxford was allocated £1.026 million by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) to award 342 National Scholarship Programme (NSP) awards to students starting their course in 2014-15 in the form of tuition fee waivers and bursary funding.<sup>79</sup> The tuition fee waivers implemented by Oxford are intended to reduce the risk that debt aversion may deter students from low income backgrounds from applying, as research suggests that debt aversion is highly prominent among potential applicants from low income households.<sup>80</sup>

Students from the UK or EU from lower-income households are eligible to receive an annual non-repayable Oxford Bursary to assist with living costs. For students who started their course in 2015, these bursaries range from £4,500 for a household income of £16,000 or less and decrease to £500 for a household income between £40,001 and £42,620 and no bursary for a household income of £42,621 and above. The latest estimated bursaries for students starting in 2016 range from £3,700 for a household income of £16,000 or less and decrease

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<sup>72</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2003). "Widening participation in higher education" London, United Kingdom.

<sup>73</sup> House of Commons. "Debate." 8 January 2004. United Kingdom.

<sup>74</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2004) "Letter to Sir Martin Harris, Director for Fair Access to Higher Education from Charles Clarke." London, United Kingdom.

<sup>75</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2004) "Letter to Sir Martin Harris, Director for Fair Access to Higher Education from Charles Clarke." London, United Kingdom.

<sup>76</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>77</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>78</sup> University of Oxford. "Oxford bursaries and fee reductions." Retrieved from: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/ug-funding/oxford-support>

<sup>79</sup> University of Oxford. "University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2014-15." Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%202014-15.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> University of Oxford. "University of Oxford Agreement with the Office for Fair Access 2014-15." Retrieved from: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Oxford%202014-15.pdf>

to £200 for a household income between £40,001 and £42,875 and no bursary for a household income of £42,876 and above.<sup>81</sup>

The bursaries offered by Oxford are based solely on the household income assessment carried out by regional funding agencies across the UK. When the student in question applies for funding, they must give their consent for the university to access this information so that an assessment for awarding bursaries may be carried out.

In addition to the bursaries offered by Oxford, a system of enhanced support is also available for students from lower income households. From September 2016, the means-tested Moritz-Heyman scholarships are awarded to students from a household with an income of £16,000 or less. The scholarship programme provides higher funding, and opportunities to access volunteering and internship opportunities. It is proposed to have up to 175 students receive this scholarship. In addition to household income, other factors are taken into account while selecting Moritz-Heyman scholars, such as the rate of participation in higher education in the post code where the student lives; socio-economic indicators in the post code where the student lives; the average attainment at GCSE and A-Level of the school attended by the student; the school's history of sending students to Oxford; and care leaver status. Greater weightage is also given to students wishing to study subjects in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Oxford also offers other scholarships to students which may have additional conditions attached to them, for instance relating to subject matter or on the basis of certain academic performance. E.g. the Apollo Bursary offers £1,000 to second year Oxford bursary holders who have demonstrated academic excellence in their first year. Another example is the Amos Griffiths Bursary which offers £1,000 to 2nd year Oxford Bursary holders studying MPLS or Medical Sciences, who have demonstrated academic excellence in their first year.<sup>82</sup> The university, as well as the individual colleges, also offer special grants to help during unforeseeable circumstances of financial hardship.

It is noted that Oxford bursaries, grants and tuition fee waivers are non-repayable by the student. The total debt burden of the student after graduation thus consists of the tuition fee loan and maintenance loan.<sup>83</sup>

## Do Bursaries Work?

Although bursaries were introduced with the aim of widening participation and increasing fair access, studies evaluating their impact have presented many critiques, including the fact that they do not benefit the poorest students, and that they are often used by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to their advantage. The evidence in this regard shows that the changes made in 2006 did not have appreciable impact on participation or fair access, with

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<sup>81</sup> University of Oxford. "2016 Support." Retrieved from:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/fees-and-funding/oxford-support?wssl=1>

<sup>82</sup> University of Oxford. "Other funding opportunities." Retrieved from: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/ug-funding/other-funding>

<sup>83</sup> University of Oxford. "Frequently Asked Questions, Oxford Support." Retrieved from: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/ug-funding/oxford-support/faqs>

participation widening prior to the introduction of bursaries<sup>84</sup>, and no evidence suggesting that post-2006 bursaries have changed application patterns between universities.<sup>85</sup> It has to be noted though that a mere before-after comparison cannot isolate the net effect of bursaries on accessibility. Many other things have changed at the same time, notably the high tuition fee rise, which might have counterbalanced positive effects of bursaries. As we do not know the counterfactual situation, i.e. what the situation would look like today without bursaries *ceteris paribus*, it is hard to give a definitive answer about the effectiveness of bursaries. This is why rigorous evaluations involving control groups are important.

Callender (2010) carried out an analysis based on university bursaries and scholarships offered by 117 HEIs in England during the academic year of 2006–2007.<sup>86</sup> The analysis covers bursaries awarded to full-time undergraduates under schemes created following the 2004 Act and further, was not limited to financial aid targeted at specific student groups. The analysis noted that 60% of the 303 schemes analysed were need-based and included some sort of means testing, and were overrepresented among HEIs enrolling the smallest number of undergraduate students (90%); those ranked in the top ten of The Times Good University Guide 2007 league tables (89%); and those belonging to the Russell Group (77%).<sup>87</sup> Bursaries that were need-based were also found most in HEIs whose students had the highest entry qualification scores (87%) and were least likely to have been drawn from public-funded secondary schools (80%) or from the lowest socio-economic groups (71%).<sup>88</sup>

The most generous bursaries were also being offered by the most selective HEIs averaging £1,794 while the least generous bursaries averaging £642 were offered by HEIs ranked between 91 and 109 in The Times Good University Guide 2007, followed by specialist Higher Education Colleges and universities in the Million+ group.<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, non-need-based programmes were over-represented in some of the least selective HEIs i.e. Higher Education Colleges (63%), followed by universities that were members of the Million+ group (55%), and universities ranked between 91 and 109 in The Times Good University Guide 2007 (61%) as was non-need-based institutional aid which was also concentrated in HEIs whose students had the lowest entry qualification scores (57%) and were most likely to come from the lowest socio-economic groups (49%)<sup>90</sup>, suggesting that HEIs with higher proportions of low-income students used their institutional aid for purposes other than improving access, such

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<sup>84</sup> Callender, C., Wilkinson, D., and Hopkin, R. (2009) "The Impact of Institutional Financial Support in England: Higher Education Students' Awareness, Knowledge and Take-Up of Bursaries and Scholarships." Bristol: Office for Fair Access.

<sup>85</sup> Neil Harrison and Sue Hatt (2012) "Expensive and failing? The role of student bursaries in widening participation and fair access in England." *Studies in Higher Education* 37 (6): 695-712.

<sup>86</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>87</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>88</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>89</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>90</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

as to strengthen their institutional position in the HE market.<sup>91</sup> Bursaries with a merit component, 78% of which were non-need-based, were most frequently found in HEIs ranked between 31 and 50 of The Times Good University Guide 2007 (50%) and in universities established before 1992 (45%).<sup>92</sup> These bursaries were aimed at attracting the brightest students which would, in turn, raise the university's reputation and their institutional positioning in the HE marketplace.<sup>93</sup> The study also noted that while bursaries and scholarships were an effective recruitment tool for a minority of students, their success was severely undermined by students' and parents' lack of awareness, knowledge, and understanding of bursaries.<sup>94</sup> The study concluded that HEIs were using institutional aid as a financial incentive to attract certain types of students and turning net price to their advantage in the competitive struggle for students, which is contrary to the aims of the policy.<sup>95</sup> It also concluded that the poorest students at the most prestigious HEIs received nearly three times more need-based non-mandatory institutional aid a year than their peers at the least prestigious HEIs, which meant that the poorest students did not benefit equally from the bursaries and scholarships.<sup>96</sup>

Most recently, a study conducted by Wyness in 2016 found that higher education bursaries were a major source of student aid with around 40% of students receiving a bursary, and universities spending around £300 million per year.<sup>97</sup> The study concluded that the decentralized nature of the bursary system creates income inequalities in the receipt of bursaries because poor students are not equally spread out across institutions, and universities with disproportionate amounts of disadvantaged students, usually non-elite, non-Russell Group institutions, have to allocate their resources amongst more students. The study also found that the bursary system benefited poor students with high A-level grades who receive the biggest bursaries on average, since they are more likely to attend elite universities.<sup>98</sup>

Another criticism of current bursaries is the difficulty on the part of the average applicant to engage with this in depth, given the number of bursaries in existence.<sup>99</sup> The complexity of the bursary market also renders the creation of a central bursary database a difficult endeavor as the database would have to be reliable and contain meaningful information that

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<sup>91</sup> Temple, P., Farrant, J. & Shattock, M. (2005) "Variable fee arrangements: baseline institutional case studies for the independent commission." London: London Institute of Education/Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>92</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>93</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>94</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>95</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>96</sup> Claire Callender (2010) "Bursaries and institutional aid in higher education in England: do they safeguard and promote fair access?" *Oxford Review of Education* 36 (1): 45-62.

<sup>97</sup> Wyness, G. (2016) "Deserving Poor: Are Higher Education Bursaries Going to the Right Students?" *Education Sciences* 6 (5).

<sup>98</sup> Wyness, G. (2016) "Deserving Poor: Are Higher Education Bursaries Going to the Right Students?" *Education Sciences* 6 (5).

<sup>99</sup> National Union of Students (2008) "Broke & broken." London: National Union of Students.

allows students to compare options, with criteria changing from year to year.<sup>100</sup> It was found that there exists a significant knowledge gap in this regard, and that neither universities, schools nor parents are doing enough to bridge this gap.<sup>101</sup> It may also be noted that while the policy objectives for widening participation and fair access have been expressed in terms of socio-economic classifications, the vast majority of the post-2006 bursary spending has been focused on a household means test which is a poor correlate for deprivation.<sup>102</sup> The current bursaries have been concluded to be not ideal, and there was an urgent need to rethink their design and implementation.<sup>103</sup>

## Part III: Original Research

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### Aims and methodology

#### Research Aims

In addition to our research based on the critical interpretation and analysis of secondary sources, we conducted a survey among secondary school students. The purpose was an exploration of challenges to access Oxbridge, particularly the University of Oxford, among less privileged students who attend middle/low quality secondary schools.

The main aims of this survey are the following:

- a) To illustrate key factors associated with the exclusion/low rate of applications for the University of Oxford, as an option to pursue undergraduate degrees, among socially deprived students from middle to low quality UK secondary education institutions<sup>104</sup>
- b) To identify the level of information about the University of Oxford, such as the application process and financial schemes among the Research Participants
- c) To examine the most influential factors and key figures playing a central role in the university choice of research participants.

It is important to note that it is not the aim of this survey to make full-fledged statistical inferences. Our findings are not generalisable to entire populations groups. This study rather constitutes an exploration of the key questions mentioned above and generates ideas and solutions to complement the existing knowledge base.

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<sup>100</sup> Neil Harrison and Sue Hatt (2012) "Expensive and failing? The role of student bursaries in widening participation and fair access in England." *Studies in Higher Education* 37 (6): 695-712.

<sup>101</sup> Davies, P., et al. (2008) "Knowing where to study: Fees, bursaries and fair access." Stoke-on-Trent: Institute for Educational Policy Research and Institute for Access Studies; Callender, C., Wilkinson, D., and Hopkin, R. (2009) "The Impact of Institutional Financial Support in England: Higher Education Students' Awareness, Knowledge and Take-Up of Bursaries and Scholarships." Bristol: Office for Fair Access.

<sup>102</sup> Goldthorpe, J., and A. McKnight (2006) "The economic basis of social class". In: S. Morgan, D. Grusky and G. Fields (eds.) *Mobility and inequality: Frontiers of research in sociology and economics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 109–236.

<sup>103</sup> Neil Harrison and Sue Hatt (2012) "Expensive and failing? The role of student bursaries in widening participation and fair access in England." *Studies in Higher Education* 37 (6): 695-712.

<sup>104</sup> Ofsted (2015) "Children's Services and Skills" Retrieved from:  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/>

## Research Population

The research population of the survey includes pupils from 16-18 years of age, which is the time when university choices are most likely to be made. They come from vast parts of the country, as we wanted to hear voices from all regions, especially because we know of geographical differences in Oxford admissions (see section 'Status quo in Oxford' for more information).

We only focused on pupils attending secondary education institutions that received low rankings from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).<sup>105</sup> The rationale behind excluding good/outstanding secondary institutions is that we would like to hear from students who are least likely to apply to Oxbridge. The low Ofsted grades are not a perfect predictor for that but a good proxy for several reasons: First, parents who send their kids to schools with low Ofsted grades are arguably less likely to encourage them to apply to prestigious universities. Second, these schools generally provide fewer and lower quality services to students (hence the low ranking), including support and guidance for university applications. Third, they are more likely to be found in deprived areas and have a higher proportion of students from economically weak backgrounds, as well as ethnic minorities and other groups that are less well represented at Oxford.<sup>106</sup> As most surveys to date have focused on pupils who have already applied to Oxbridge, we are interested in incorporating more voices to the analysis of the topic.

## Survey design and dissemination

The survey was conducted using a free online survey software called 'SurveyMonkey'.<sup>107</sup> It consisted of 10 questions, which included demographic information such as age, geographical region and parents' highest education attainment; a rating question of factors influencing university choice; a ranking exercise about their biggest concerns about applying to Oxford; a question about whether they have been contacted by the University of Oxford and whether they found it helpful; one about whether they would be willing to take out a government loan; and one about whether they would prefer a contribution to university fees or rather to living costs. In the last question, they were given the choice to provide an email address in order to be considered for the draw of an Amazon voucher worth £20. The complete questionnaire, including summarized results, is attached to this report and can be found in the appendix.

For the recruitment of research participants, at least 25 secondary UK Institutions with an Ofsted ranking of 3 or 4 were randomly selected for each UK geographical region. A key requirement for the selection of the secondary institution was the provision of at least one school email address, either of the head teacher or school administrative team, in the Ofsted Report. After identifying email addresses from the selected school, an informal email

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<sup>105</sup> For this study we included Ofsted grades 3 ('Requires improvement') and 4 ('Inadequate').

<sup>106</sup> For more information see Ofsted (2013/14) "The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14." Retrieved from:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/384707/Ofsted\\_Annual\\_Report\\_201314\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/384707/Ofsted_Annual_Report_201314_Schools.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> For more information see SurveyMonkey website at: [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)



message was sent, explaining the purpose and relevance of the research project and giving information about anonymity concerns and the possibility to win an Amazon voucher. The invitation sent to the schools is attached in the appendix of this report.

### Ethical Considerations

The only contact with the selected institutions was through the recruitment email mentioned in the previous section. They were free to decide whether to forward the questionnaire to the students and the students were free to decide whether they want to take part in the research or not. Since names were not required in the questionnaire, it guaranteed complete anonymity. Provision of an email address in order to be considered for winning an Amazon voucher was completely voluntary. No other personal data was asked for at any point. School names were also not requested and they could not be traced back from the online responses. IP-tracking was switched off and the 'Make Anonymous' function offered by SurveyMonkey was used. No questions were made mandatory and participants were free to skip what they did not feel comfortable or competent answering.



### Findings and discussion

#### Demographics

The survey was conducted between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. We received 76 responses from 8 out of the 9 regions of England. Most responses were gathered from the South West region with 44% of total responses and the least responsive regions were London, with no response, and East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber with 1.33% of contribution (1 response) each. The vast majority of respondents were within the specified age group of 16-18 years, with 4 respondents being slightly below (15) and one outlier being above (29).

To the question regarding parent's education (Question 3), 34.67% reported their parents to have only completed their GCSE/O-levels and 16% reported A-level qualification. In terms of higher education participation, 20% of parents have a bachelor's degree, 6.67% have a master's degree and none have advanced degrees like a doctorate. Some participants reported their parents to have a vocational degree (8%) and as many as 14.67% reported that they did not know their parents' educational background which can be meaningful when one explores and speculates about attitudes and motivation towards (higher) education in families.

Overall we see our sample, although not big and without bias, as consistent with the research aims as it includes a wide range of voices from pupils at the age of making higher education choices from less privileged schools and backgrounds in most parts of England.

### Main findings of the survey

To explore the factors that influenced the choice of a university (Question 4), participants were asked to attribute the labels ‘very much’, ‘a bit’, ‘not much’ and ‘not at all’ to the importance that 8 broad factors played in their university choice. It has to be noted that for the 70 respondents, weighted scores<sup>108</sup> are quite close to each other, meaning that all factors do play a role. The list is headed by rather practical factors, with ‘City/Location’ of the university at the top (1.50), followed by ‘Cost of living’ (1.79), ‘Rankings/reputation!’ (1.86), ‘Financial support/bursaries’ (1.94) and ‘Fees’ (2.13). Interpersonal factors are seen as slightly less important, with ‘Social life’ (2.16) coming closely before ‘School/teacher advice’ and ‘Friends/family advice’ (both 2.19). Participants were given the option to mention other factors in a comment field, as we did not want to restrict them to pre-determined choices and generate more ideas. 10 pupils wrote that the course and its content was another major factor that influences application, 2 mentioned accommodation costs and one mentioned transport.

**Figure 3:** Overview of OxPolicy survey responses to the question “How much do the following factors influence your university choice?”, 2016

	Very much	A bit	Not much	Not at all	Total	Weighted Average
Rankings/reputation	37.68% 26	44.93% 31	11.59% 8	5.80% 4	69	1.86
City/Location	61.43% 43	31.43% 22	2.86% 2	4.29% 3	70	1.50
Social life	22.86% 16	47.14% 33	21.43% 15	8.57% 6	70	2.16
Fees	34.78% 24	33.33% 23	15.94% 11	15.94% 11	69	2.13
Costs of living	50.00% 35	27.14% 19	17.14% 12	5.71% 4	70	1.79
Financial support/bursaries	32.86% 23	44.29% 31	18.57% 13	4.29% 3	70	1.94
School/teacher advice	20.29% 14	49.28% 34	21.74% 15	8.70% 6	69	2.19
Friends/family advice	17.39% 12	52.17% 36	24.64% 17	5.80% 4	69	2.19

Source: OxPolicy.

<sup>108</sup> The scale ranges from 1 (being very much influence) to 4 (being no influence at all).

Question 5 assessed the barriers that participants felt were their biggest concerns about applying to Oxford. There were 5 factors to be ranked, with 1 representing the biggest concern and 5 the smallest. Average ranks were calculated based on an inverse scale that gives 5 points to choice number one, 4 points to choice number 2, etc. These average rankings reveal that ‘Competition’ (3.44 weighted score) is seen as the most important factor, with a third of respondents seeing it as their number one concern. Many also felt that the ‘Complex application process and interviews’ (3.26) were a concern. ‘Cost’ (3.09) and ‘Elitism’ (2.78) were further down in the list of reasons that could prohibit them from applying to Oxford. ‘Lack of information and support’ (2.52) was seen as the least important factor, which could be due to the fact that it is what mainly helps to overcome the other barriers on the list, a secondary concern in other words.

**Figure 3:** Overview of OxPolicy survey responses to the question “What are your biggest concerns about applying to Oxford or other competitive universities? Please rank the following with 1 being biggest and 5 being smallest.”, 2016

	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Score
Complex application process, interviews	20.97% 13	25.81% 16	20.97% 13	22.58% 14	9.68% 6	62	3.26
Competition	33.33% 21	19.05% 12	20.63% 13	12.70% 8	14.29% 9	63	3.44
Lack of information and support	6.56% 4	14.75% 9	26.23% 16	29.51% 18	22.95% 14	61	2.52
Costs	21.54% 14	26.15% 17	12.31% 8	20.00% 13	20.00% 13	65	3.09
Elitism	19.40% 13	13.43% 9	22.39% 15	14.93% 10	29.85% 20	67	2.78

Source: OxPolicy.

The vast majority of participants (86.57%) reported that they have never been contacted by University of Oxford (question 6). 3 had attended a summer school (4.48%) and only 2 had someone deliver a university presentation (2.99%) and one person (1.49%) respectively was contacted by Target Schools, had a personal meeting or received letters or emails. 5 pupils (5.97%) got in touch with some other sort of access scheme.

Question 7 then tried to understand whether the pupils found the outreach campaigns helpful or not. Although the majority (72.50%) reported ‘no’, this result does not tell us much as many of those who claimed not to have been contacted by the university also replied. It is thus worth having a closer look at individual responses, as well as the comments that people were invited to make to this question to further explain the reasons behind their answers. All of the respondents who had participated in an outreach scheme and left a comment reported that they found it helpful. A comment on the summer school reads ‘it gave me an insight on university costs and the benefits’, one on Target Schools says ‘Gave me some good information on how studying at Oxford is like’ and one on ‘other

outreach/access scheme' reports 'I learnt a lot about university life at Oxford, mainly from students currently there that it wasn't as bias against state schools than what i originally presumed'.

Out of 66 respondents, as many as 81.82% said that they would be willing to take out a government loan to pay for tuition fees and/or living costs (Question 8). Some of those who did not used the comment function to explain their answer. Most comments cited debt aversion while one said 'I don't know enough about it'.

In question 9 we tried to explore whether people were more concerned about study fees or living costs by asking them to which they would rather like to see a contribution (assuming equal value). Both options were nearly equally popular with 53.97% choosing Bursaries and contribution towards living costs' and 46.03% 'Reduced fee'.

## Part IV: Policy Recommendations

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### At a glance

#### Application process

- Make the application process more standardized and transparent.

#### Bursaries

- Establish a less complex and more transparent bursary system.
- Provide financial support for poor students who live further away.

#### Outreach

- Reach out to parents and teachers.
- Subsidise travel costs to outreach schemes that take place in Oxford.

#### Evaluation

- Conduct rigorous evaluations of efforts to widen access and publish them.

### Application process

- A more standardized and transparent application process

As pointed out in this report, the application process for Oxford (and Cambridge) is very complex, with different requirements and processes for different courses and over 30 colleges to choose from. This can be intimidating for students, especially for those who do not attend schools that specifically prepare them for it.<sup>109</sup>

We thus suggest that the application process be more standardized to reduce disparities in admissions between courses and colleges and to make it less confusing and intimidating. In the place of the individual colleges designing specific admission procedures, thus

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<sup>109</sup> Sellgren, Kathering. "Oxbridge college admissions 'complex and intimidating'." The Sutton Trust. Retrieved from: <http://www.suttontrust.com/oxbridge-college-admissions-complex-and-intimidating/>

encouraging inequality and unfair access to those students with better information at privately educated schools, the application and admissions' process should be structured by the university itself. The delegation to colleges should happen only after the students have been chosen. A standardized admission process means that all students experience greater equality in the admissions process; in the tests and interviews, regardless of social status and academic background.

The number of respondents to our survey who felt that the complex application process was their biggest concern about applying to Oxford or other competitive universities underlines the need for more, and clearer, information about how the application process works. 21% ranked it as their biggest concern, with 25% ranking it as their second-biggest concern.

The transparency of the application process should also be increased. In the status quo, even after extensive research, it is unclear how the application process for every college and discipline works exactly and especially what the requirements are that can lead to success. Oxford should provide more information online as the internet facilitates access thereby eradicating a large barrier to inequality and unfair access to information. The internet is an appropriate medium for universities to provide information as it can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection. It is also relatively easy and inexpensive to provide more information online. With more transparency on the application process, this will foster a greater equality of access to Oxford as all students are able to access detailed information about each stage of the application process. This information would be made available to students originating from state schools and less privileged backgrounds who previously have been at a disadvantage with the degree to which they are kept informed about the application process purely due to the type of school they attend.

Whilst a lack of information and support did not rank very high in our survey, the big concerns about the complex nature of the application process expressed by the pupils could be mitigated through an increase in the information available which explains how the process works exactly.

We would like to point out that these recommendations do not imply 'easier' entrance exams and interviews, but a less complicated and more transparent structure and requirements of the admissions process. We believe that following the recommendation, Oxford and Cambridge would attract even more competent applicants who are put off or intimidated in the status quo and thus get closer to their aim of admitting the brightest and most hard-working students with lower bias of advantage through encouragement and information by privileged schools and families.

## **Bursaries**

- A less complex and more transparent bursary system

Part I of this report pointed out that the recent higher education reforms, especially the rise of university fees to up to £9000 and shift of the cost of higher education from the government to the students, have many flaws. Ideally, the HE system should be reformed for the better, including lower or no fees, increased government funds (the UK currently spends

less on HE than the world average) and more government responsibility for widening access and participation (which is mainly the duty of individual universities in the status quo<sup>110</sup>).

However, as universities have to operate 'inside the system', we would also like to give recommendations about how the status quo can be improved by individual institutions themselves. As pointed out in various sections of this report, the wide range of bursaries of varying amounts eligibility criteria can easily confuse prospective students. We thus suggest that a less complex bursary system, with more transparency and effective provision of information, should be established.

Financial issues are a big concern for students and our survey suggests that many see bursaries as an important factor when choosing a university. As institutional financial aid provided by HEIs plays an enormously important role in the bursary system, it is critical to ensure that clear information on bursaries and scholarships is accessible to students. Therefore, an effective information database about bursaries and scholarships funded by universities should be established, making it practical for students to learn about and compare the institutional financial aids they are eligible to apply for before they apply to certain universities. Hence, bursaries would be able to show more impact on students' choices of HEIs they apply to. In order to build a central comprehensive database consisting of institutional bursaries, it is also vital that better accountability mechanism for universities to provide clear, explicit and accurate information, and to use bursaries for purpose of benefiting the least advantaged students, be developed.

In the special case of Oxford, the university should endorse the establishment of the central database of institutional financial assistance by supplying accurate information and guidance for prospective students, and even take a lead in the establishment process. It is predictable that building such a central bursary database would be a difficult endeavor, as the information would be dynamic and change from year to year, and thus it would be essential that Oxford, as a significant figure of higher education in the UK, takes a stance in the process.

- Financial support for students who live further away

Oxford offers a number of geography related bursaries, all supported by alumni who aim to support students in their local area. The Oxford University Society, for example, has a number of groups/individual alumni who choose to run award packages to fund summer projects<sup>111</sup>. These groups target students from areas in the south of England, such as Hertfordshire and Cornwall. Students associated with the areas of Norfolk or Suffolk can also benefit from the Palgrave Brown Scholarship,<sup>112</sup> which, unlike others, provides a grant intended to help with actual living costs.

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<sup>110</sup> Burke, P. J. (2013). "The right to higher education: neoliberalism, gender and professional mis/recognitions." *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 23 (2): 107-126.

<sup>111</sup> University of Oxford. "Student Awards." Retrieved from: <http://www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/student-awards>

<sup>112</sup> University of Oxford. "2016 Oxford Support." Retrieved from: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/fees-and-funding/oxford-support?wssl=1>

Because geography related bursaries at Oxford are entirely alumni dependent (the situation in Cambridge is similar) this means that the areas which require them the most may not receive them. The existence of a highly topical north south divide<sup>113</sup> in terms of prosperity also strengthens the case for a fairer system that does not only target areas with wealthier students (in general). This is particularly important as many of the current schemes target areas in the south, reflecting the inadequacy of the current system. The issue of travel costs further adds to the case for those who live further away to be a greater focus, and with the north-south divide at times being socially divisive,<sup>114</sup> those from northern areas may also feel that they do not 'fit in' with other students at Oxford.

We thus propose the introduction of financial support for poor students who live far away from the university to combat distance-related disincentives for make an application. This should at the very least cover the high travel costs and ideally should also contribute to bridging the difference in living costs between places like Oxford and the North of England.

Our report also noted that each Oxford College is linked to a particular Local Authority, though the allocation of a college to a region seems to be largely random. A reshuffling of local authority links to greater reflect college endowments and assets should also be considered.

## **Outreach**

- Reach out to parents and teachers

Parents and teachers play a big role in shaping children's lives as they spend much time with them, teach them and act as role models. This also concerns the university application process. By establishing more information and outreach campaigns which specifically target parents and teachers, accessibility to Oxbridge is likely to see improvements. Respondents to our survey showed that the advice given to them by family, and teachers was an important factor in their choice of university: 20% felt the advice of teachers influenced them "very much", with 49% feeling it influenced them "a bit"; 17% felt friends/family advice influenced them "very much" and 52% felt it influenced them "a bit". These numbers reflect pupils' perceptions about the influence which might actually be even bigger. We thus suggest to increase efforts to inform parents and teachers about applying to and studying at Oxbridge universities.

A factor which is difficult to measure is the element of personal attitudes of parents which might influence their advice to their children, from bias towards a university, as well as a lack of information surrounding applications. By focusing specifically on parents through targeted information campaigns and an information service at the university that they can refer to for any questions, it is possible that parents might feel more at ease and better informed, and therefore more supportive of their children if they wish to apply to Oxbridge. This is also important because some parents may not have had the opportunity to experience university

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<sup>113</sup> The Economist (2012) "The great divide." Retrieved from: <http://www.economist.com/node/21562938>

<sup>114</sup> The Telegraph (2006) "How strong is England's North/South divide? Your view." Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/yourview/1531163/How-strong-is-Englands-NorthSouth-divide.html>

life for themselves, as can be gauged from the highest educational attainment of the parents of the respondents of the survey: the majority - 35% - achieved GCSEs or O-Levels, with 16% reaching A-Level.

Some colleges and schools have a dedicated Oxbridge co-ordinator to aid students and parents in understanding the application process, give interview advice, and organise trips to open days at the universities. Whilst this is not a feasible measure for all schools and colleges, it demonstrates the extent to which Oxbridge applications are seen as complicated and unclear by having a role specifically dedicated to the two universities. Many schools and colleges have a careers team which advises about universities and we suggest that providing information to the relevant members of staff would be beneficial as those individuals advising pupils and parents would be equipped with the relevant information to help them come to an informed decision.

- Subsidise travel to outreach schemes in Oxford

Oxford should aim, where possible, to extend its funding for travel and accommodation in its access and outreach schemes. As noted in part II of this report, many of the flagship access scheme for Oxford, including Oxford Pathways Programme and Target Schools, continues to be limited in the sense that it does not provide travel reimbursements despite being held in Oxford – an area that many be hours of travel and hundreds of miles away for many potential applicants. The schemes therefore not only depend on the ability of families (or schools) to be able to pay for the travel of their child or student, but also rely on the motivation and willingness of families or schools to pay for this travel. This may inadvertently exclude the most disadvantaged students, if their families are unable to afford substantial travel costs, or do not see the value of them attending an outreach day at Oxford – in particular, this is likely to be a problem for families who place less value on attending university of Oxford compared to stable employment, who themselves are likely to be parents with no experience of attending university themselves.

A barrier may also be related to the student themselves – they may have less motivation or willingness to travel for several hours for a single day if they do not see Oxford as somewhere where they might ‘fit in;’ this is significant given the fact that many Oxford access schemes aim to ‘debunk myths’ relating to life at Oxford – something which Target Schools in particular renown itself for. These issues might inadvertently exclude the students who might benefit the most from a better understanding of life at Oxford. This in turn might reinforce existing barriers relating to regional inequalities and access to Oxford: counties surrounding Oxford tend to be relatively middle class with good advancement to higher education, whilst regions such as Northern Ireland, North England, Scotland and Wales are relatively under-represented at Oxford,<sup>115</sup> and will also experience the greatest financial cost. In this way, the access and outreach schemes may continue to reinforce some of the barriers that exclude the most disadvantaged students that are prevalent at the level of application.

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<sup>115</sup> University of Oxford. “University of Oxford Undergraduate Admissions Statistics: 2013 entry.” Retrieved from: [http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/gazette/documents/statisticalinformation/admissionsstatistics/Admissions\\_Statistics\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/gazette/documents/statisticalinformation/admissionsstatistics/Admissions_Statistics_2013.pdf)



Oxford should thus aim to provide travel reimbursement at the very least for students attending their access and outreach schemes. If there is an issue of financial feasibility or effectiveness, one strategy might be evaluating the need of students based on household income or other indicators of household socio-economic status, or alternatively, another indicator of school-based needs.

It is important to note that limitations might remain in terms of relative travel time compared to time attending the access scheme – such that students may see travelling for hours for a day-long scheme (compared to a week-long such as UNIQ), or a scheme that requires travelling in the early hours of the morning in order to arrive at Oxford at time as a major disincentive. A good way to tackle this is increasing ‘road shows’ of outreach schemes to further away deprived areas, as already done by Oxford University Student Union’s Target Schools initiative.

#### Better evaluation of efforts to widen access

The Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach (UAO) office at the University of Oxford conducts evaluations of most of their schemes to widen access and participation. These are however only used for internal purposes and to report to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and results are unfortunately rarely made public and thus other institutions and policy-makers cannot learn from it.

Most of the current evaluation research is also merely descriptive and looks at numbers of scheme participants, application and admissions statistics, as well as before-after comparisons. However, to accurately measure the effect that a scheme has, it is crucial to have a suitable control group as we do not know the counterfactual situation (i.e. what would have happened had the same pupil not participated in the scheme, *ceteris paribus*). The best way to isolate the impact is conducting a randomized controlled trial, in which participants are randomly assigned to a treatment group, which takes part in the scheme, and a control group, which does not. Because of the randomization, there are no other structural differences between the groups. Even though this is the best method to evaluate the impact of schemes to widen access, which is a very important endeavor, there are ethical concerns that prevail as it implies denying the participation in the scheme to some people. As some programmes, such as the UNIQ summer school, are heavily oversubscribed, some pupils will be denied access anyway as not all applicants can be taken. This means, that there naturally exists a control group, namely those students who have applied and were not accepted. The theoretical feasibility was confirmed by the Senior Head of Outreach and Evaluation at the University of Oxford in an informal conversation. It could even be considered to randomly draw the successful participants for one edition of the programme in order to have an ideal control group.

Our proposal is to conduct rigorous impact evaluations, preferably randomized controlled trials, and to publish them for the wider public.



## Appendix

Overview of survey questions and summarized results on surveymonkey.com:

Q1

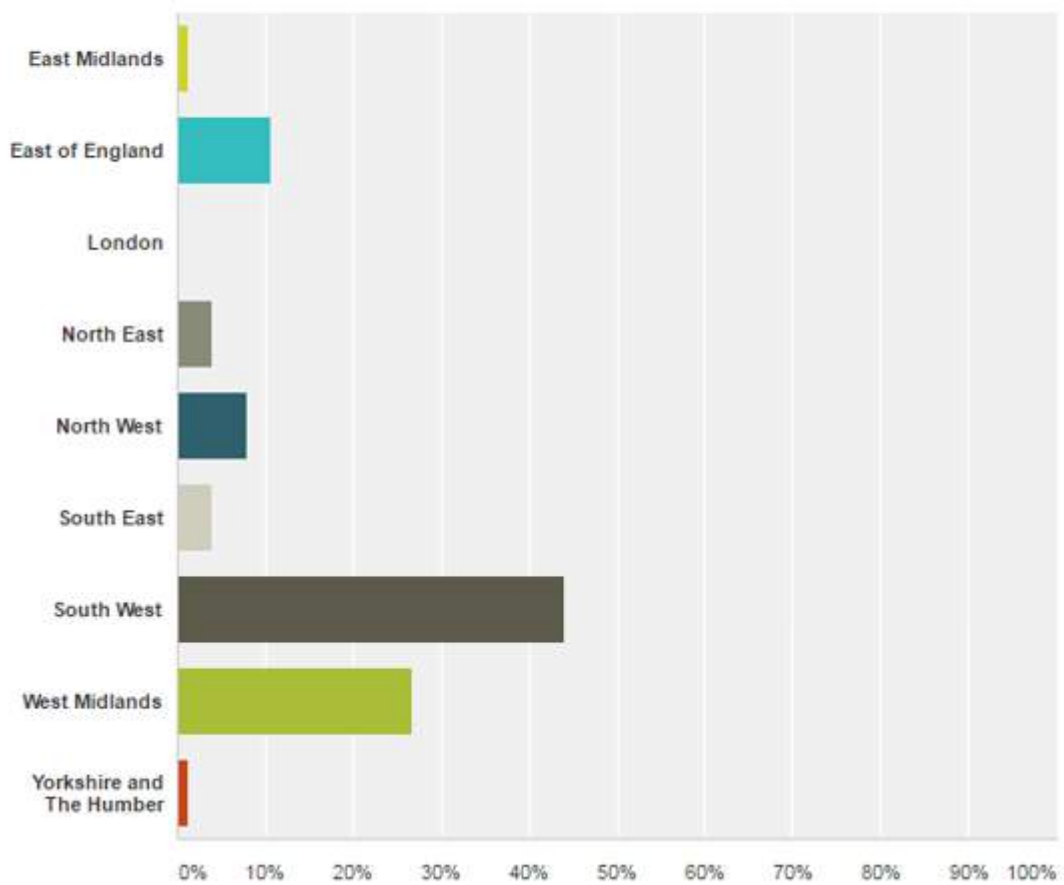
### Your age

Answered: 75 Skipped: 1

Q2

### What region do you live in?

Answered: 75 Skipped: 1

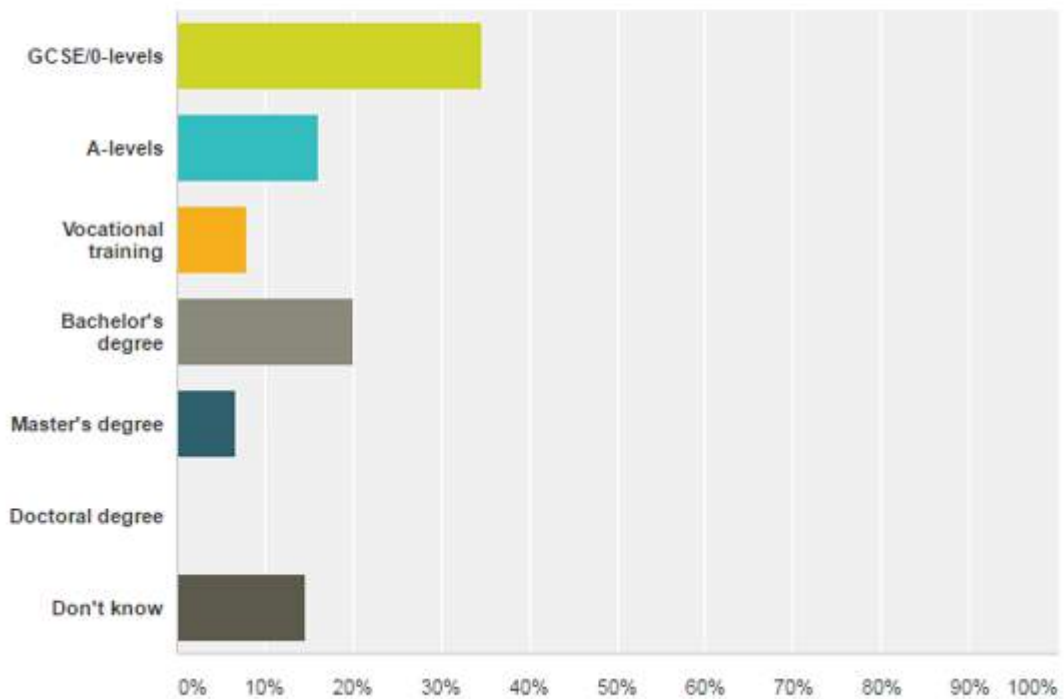


Answer Choices	Responses	
East Midlands	1.33%	1
East of England	10.67%	8
London	0.00%	0
North East	4.00%	3
North West	8.00%	6
South East	4.00%	3
South West	44.00%	33
West Midlands	26.67%	20
Yorkshire and The Humber	1.33%	1
Total		75

Q3

### What is your parents' highest educational attainment? (Please indicate the education of the parent with the highest level of attainment)

Answered: 75 Skipped: 1

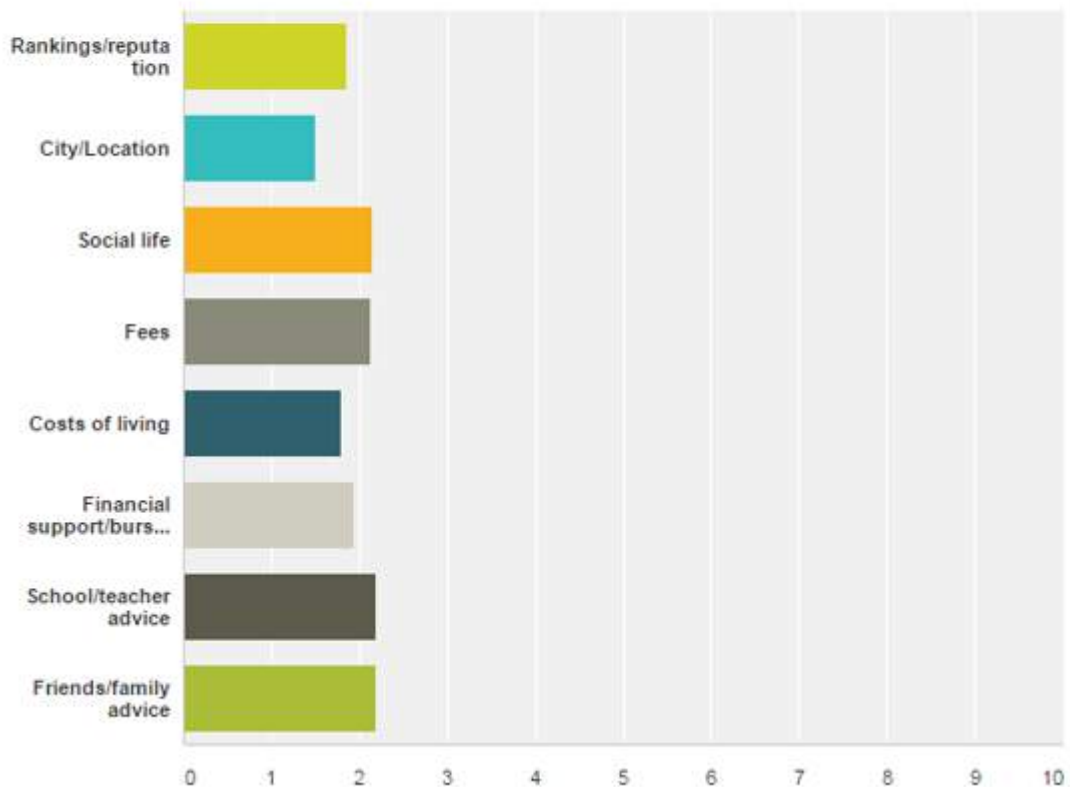


Answer Choices	Responses	
GCSE/0-levels	34.67%	26
A-levels	16.00%	12
Vocational training	8.00%	6
Bachelor's degree	20.00%	15
Master's degree	6.67%	5
Doctoral degree	0.00%	0
Don't know	14.67%	11
Total		75

Q4

### How much do the following factors influence your university choice?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 6

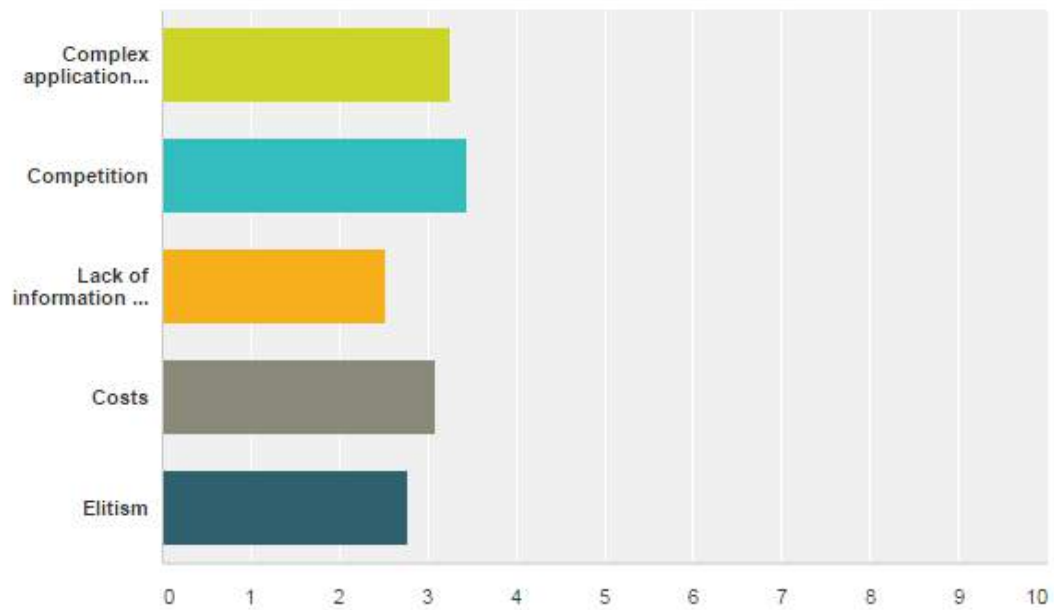


	Very much	A bit	Not much	Not at all	Total	Weighted Average
Rankings/reputation	37.68% 26	44.93% 31	11.59% 8	5.80% 4	69	1.86
City/Location	61.43% 43	31.43% 22	2.86% 2	4.29% 3	70	1.50
Social life	22.86% 16	47.14% 33	21.43% 15	8.57% 6	70	2.16
Fees	34.78% 24	33.33% 23	15.94% 11	15.94% 11	69	2.13
Costs of living	50.00% 35	27.14% 19	17.14% 12	5.71% 4	70	1.79
Financial support/bursaries	32.86% 23	44.29% 31	18.57% 13	4.29% 3	70	1.94
School/teacher advice	20.29% 14	49.28% 34	21.74% 15	8.70% 6	69	2.19
Friends/family advice	17.39% 12	52.17% 36	24.64% 17	5.80% 4	69	2.19

Q5

**What are your biggest concerns about applying to Oxford or other competitive universities? Please rank the following with 1 being biggest and 5 being smallest.**

Answered: 67 Skipped: 9

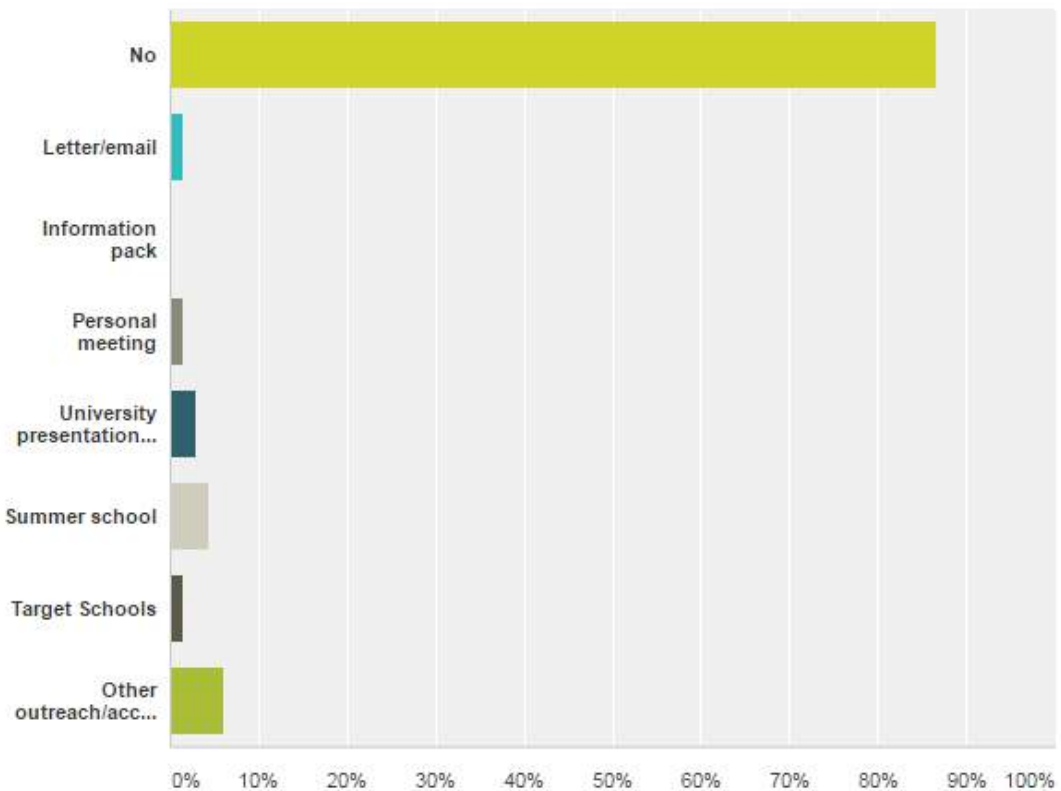


	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Score
Complex application process, interviews	20.97% 13	25.81% 16	20.97% 13	22.58% 14	9.68% 6	62	3.26
Competition	33.33% 21	19.05% 12	20.63% 13	12.70% 8	14.29% 9	63	3.44
Lack of information and support	6.56% 4	14.75% 9	26.23% 16	29.51% 18	22.95% 14	61	2.52
Costs	21.54% 14	26.15% 17	12.31% 8	20.00% 13	20.00% 13	65	3.09
Elitism	19.40% 13	13.43% 9	22.39% 15	14.93% 10	29.85% 20	67	2.78

Q6

**Have you ever been contacted by the University of Oxford or participated in an access scheme? If yes, which? (Multiple choices possible)**

Answered: 67 Skipped: 9

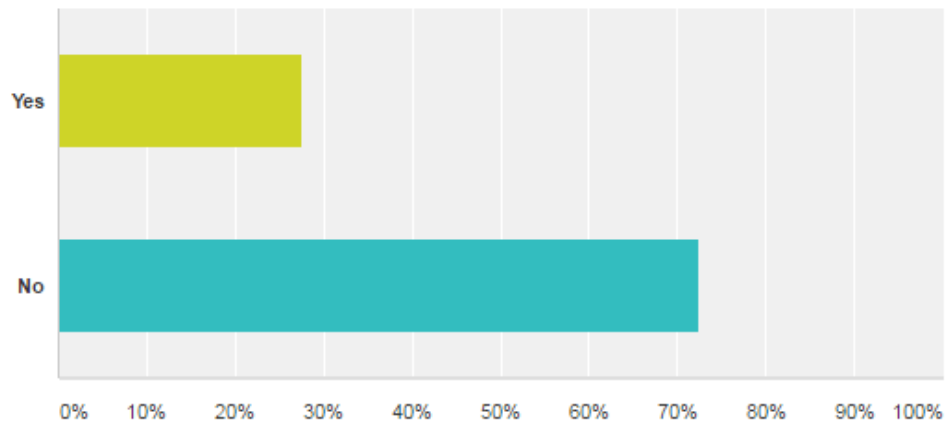


Answer Choices	Responses	
No	86.57%	58
Letter/email	1.49%	1
Information pack	0.00%	0
Personal meeting	1.49%	1
University presentation/information event	2.99%	2
Summer school	4.48%	3
Target Schools	1.49%	1
Other outreach/access scheme	5.97%	4
Total Respondents: 67		

Q7

### Did you find it helpful?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 36



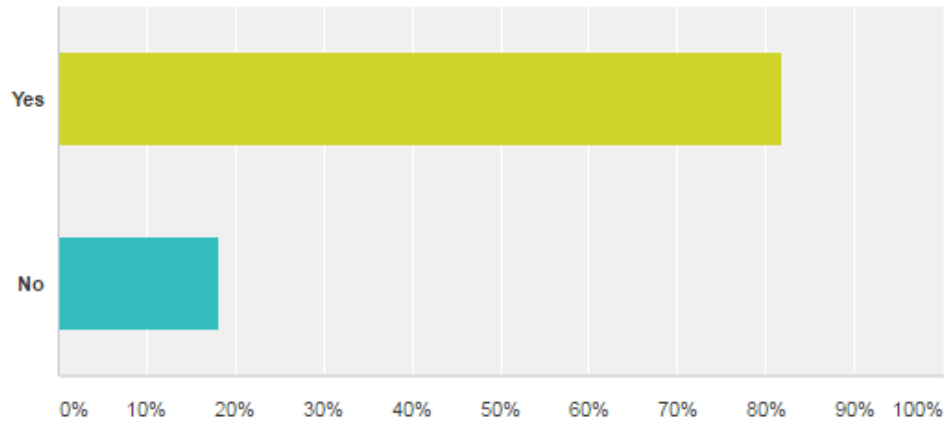
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	27.50%	11
No	72.50%	29
Total		40



Q8

### Would you take out a government loan to pay for tuition fees and/or living costs?

Answered: 66 Skipped: 10

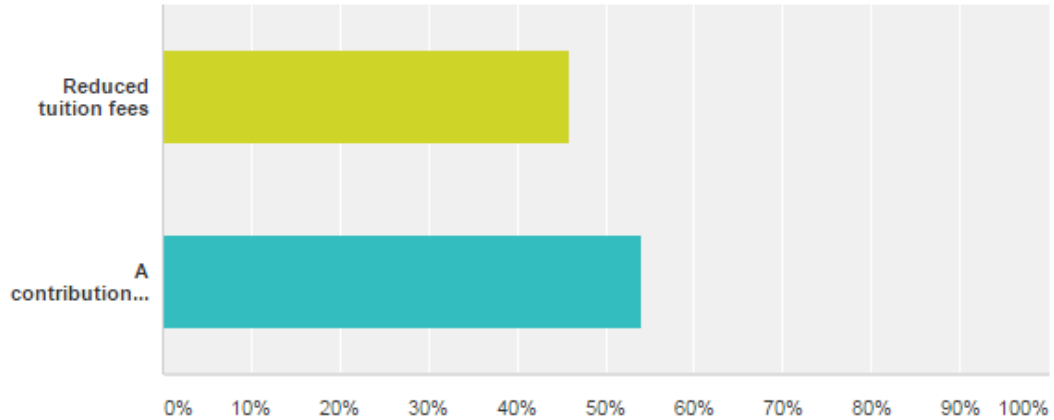


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	81.82%	54
No	18.18%	12
Total		66

Q9

**If you were offered financial support, which one would you choose (assuming they are equal value)?**

Answered: 63 Skipped: 13




Answer Choices	Responses
Reduced tuition fees	46.03% 29
A contribution/bursary to your living costs	53.97% 34
Total	63

Q10

**If you would like to be considered for the draw of a 20 pounds Amazon voucher, please leave your email address here:**

Answered: 44 Skipped: 32

Powered by  SurveyMonkey