

Oxbridge Ambassador for Wales

Analysis of the attainment of Welsh applicants to Oxford and Cambridge universities

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This paper follows the analysis in the previous paper in this series 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base' which identified the disparity between Welsh admission to Oxford and Cambridge, and attainment in GCSE and A level examinations in comparison with the rest of the UK. This paper investigates the relationship between prior attainment and success in admission to these universities.

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Introduction

The Oxbridge Ambassador's paper 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base' identified that, during the academic years 2007-08 to 2011-12, Welsh-domiciled applicants had a statistically lower chance than UK-domiciled applicants of being shortlisted, offered places, and ultimately accepted at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. For the same period, it also demonstrated that, on a number of key measures, there were relatively low percentages of Welsh students attaining top academic grades in public examinations, compared with England and Northern Ireland. It suggested that there might be a relationship between these points, i.e., that relatively low upper-end attainment in Wales might be leading to relatively low progression by Welsh students to Oxford and Cambridge. However, it also noted that the data presented were insufficient to confirm or deny such a pattern.

This paper will accordingly consider available data on the academic performance of Welsh applicants to Oxford and Cambridge for the period 2008-12, to investigate in more detail the relationship (or lack thereof) between upper-end attainment and progression to Oxford and Cambridge. To do this, it will use new data provided by Oxford University Admissions Office (OUAO) and Cambridge Admissions Office (CAO). Mindful of the differences between the Oxford and Cambridge admissions processes, highlighted in 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base'¹ and elsewhere, this paper will evaluate applications to the two universities separately.

¹ Oxford and Cambridge, although in some ways similar, have markedly different admissions processes. For applicants sitting modular AS- and A-Levels, Cambridge relies heavily upon average unit module scores for both interview shortlisting and subsequent selection. This position, which is unusual in the UK HE sector, has been adopted because the University has identified that applicants' average UMS are a strong (arguably the strongest) predictor of subsequent performance in Cambridge degrees.¹ In contrast, Oxford requires applicants to complete pre-interview subject-specific admissions tests, which, along with GCSE results, form the basis of shortlisting for interview and admissions decisions. Following interviews, Cambridge typically requires A-Level offer-holders to attain a minimum of A*AA, whereas Oxford's standard A-Level offers vary from AAA to A*A*A depending upon the course.¹ In short and to reiterate, it is not possible or desirable to describe a homogenous "Oxbridge" admissions process. Though their outcomes may be similar, the two are different and should not be conflated.

Section 1: Cambridge

As stated in ‘Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base’, for applicants sitting modular AS- and A-Levels (i.e., the overwhelming majority of UK applicants), Cambridge relies heavily upon average unit module scores (UMS) for both interview shortlisting and subsequent selection. This position, which is unusual in the UK HE sector, has been adopted because the University has identified that applicants’ average UMS are a strong (arguably the strongest) predictor of subsequent performance in Cambridge degrees.² When reviewing the success rates of applicants to Cambridge, therefore, it is important to note those applicants’ GCSE performance as an initial indicator of academic potential but more critical to note their average UMS at AS- and A-Level: best three for Arts and Humanities applicants; most relevant three for Science applicants.

The following tables show the average number of GCSE A*s and the average best three or most relevant three UMS at the point of application for applicants to, offer holders at, and entrants to Cambridge for the period 2009-12.³ Subsequent attainment at A-Level (average number of As and, from 2010, A*s) is additionally provided for information, as are analogous figures for rejected applicants. In line with the data considered in ‘Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base’ this paper concentrates on applicants domiciled in Wales, England, and Northern Ireland. Scotland is not shown separately because the majority of Scottish applicants do not present GCSEs and A-Levels and would accordingly make for ineffective comparators. However, for completeness, Scottish figures are incorporated into the recording of UK data. The figures presented are aggregated for all applicable educational sectors: maintained, independent, secondary, tertiary, and other.

² <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/admissions/research/> [accessed 03/04/14]

³ CAO was unable to supply average UMS data for the academic year 2007-08, so 2008 figures have been discounted from this analysis on the grounds of incompleteness.

Table 1.1: Academic attainment of applicants to Cambridge, 2009-12

Year	Avg # GCSE A*s				Avg UMS				Avg # A-Level As				Avg # A-Level A*s			
	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK
2009	4.7	4.3	4.0	4.3	88.2%	89.2%	93.1%	89.2%	3.2	3.2	3.5	3.2	-	-	-	-
2010	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.4	89.0%	89.8%	93.5%	89.9%	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.5	2.2
2011	5.1	4.5	4.7	4.8	88.7%	88.5%	91.2%	88.5%	2.0	1.9	2.1	1.9	2.2	2.2	2.6	2.2
2012	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.5	88.9%	89.7%	91.4%	89.7%	2.0	1.9	2.0	1.9	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.2
Average	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.5	88.7%	89.3%	92.3%	89.3%	-	-	-	-	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.2

Table 1.2: Academic attainment of applicants rejected by Cambridge, 2009-12

Year	Avg # GCSE A*s				Avg UMS				Avg # A-Level As				Avg # A-Level A*s			
	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK
2009	4.5	4.1	3.8	4.1	86.8%	87.6%	91.9%	87.7%	3.0	3.0	3.3	3.0	-	-	-	-
2010	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.2	87.5%	88.2%	91.7%	88.2%	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.1	1.8	1.8	2.0	1.9
2011	4.8	4.3	4.7	4.4	87.1%	86.5%	89.5%	86.6%	2.1	2.0	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.9	2.2	1.9
2012	4.4	4.4	3.9	4.4	87.4%	87.7%	89.8%	87.8%	2.1	1.9	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8
Average	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.3	87.2%	87.5%	90.7%	87.6%	-	-	-	-	1.8	1.8	2.0	1.9

Table 1.3: Academic attainment of Cambridge offer holders, 2009-12

Year	Avg # GCSE A*s				Avg UMS				Avg # A-Level As				Avg # A-Level A*s			
	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK
2009	5.4	5.1	4.7	5.1	93.2%	92.6%	95.0%	92.7%	3.7	3.6	3.9	3.6	-	-	-	-
2010	5.1	5.2	4.4	5.2	93.4%	93.2%	96.6%	93.2%	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.9	2.6	2.7	3.2	2.7
2011	6.5	5.1	4.8	5.1	92.6%	92.3%	93.9%	92.4%	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.6	2.9	2.7	3.1	2.7
2012	5.7	5.2	5.9	5.2	93.1%	93.4%	95.3%	93.4%	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.7	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.7
Average	5.7	5.2	5.0	5.2	93.1%	92.9%	95.2%	92.9%	-	-	-	-	2.7	2.7	3.0	2.7

Table 1.4: Academic attainment of Cambridge entrants, 2009-12

Year	Avg # GCSE A*s				Avg UMS				Avg # A-Level As				Avg # A-Level A*s			
	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK
2009	6.2	5.3	4.7	5.3	93.8%	93.1%	94.9%	93.2%	3.7	3.7	3.9	3.7	-	-	-	-
2010	4.8	5.3	4.2	5.2	93.5%	93.6%	96.9%	93.7%	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.9	2.6	2.7	3.1	2.7
2011	6.5	5.2	5.1	5.2	92.6%	92.7%	93.9%	92.7%	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.8	2.7	3.1	2.8
2012	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.4	93.3%	93.9%	95.1%	93.9%	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.7
Average	5.8	5.3	5.0	5.3	93.3%	93.3%	95.2%	93.4%	-	-	-	-	2.7	2.7	3.0	2.7

Table 1.5: Academic attainment at each point of the Cambridge application process, 2009-12

	Avg # GCSE A*s				Avg UMS				09 Avg # A-Level As				10-12 Avg # A-Level A*s			
	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK	W	E	NI	UK
Applicants	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.5	88.7%	89.3%	92.3%	89.3%	3.2	3.2	3.5	3.2	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.2
Rejected	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.3	87.2%	87.5%	90.7%	87.6%	3.0	3.0	3.3	3.0	1.8	1.8	2.0	1.9
Offer Holders	5.7	5.2	5.0	5.2	93.1%	92.9%	95.2%	92.9%	3.7	3.6	3.9	3.6	2.7	2.7	3.0	2.7
Entrants	5.8	5.3	5.0	5.3	93.3%	93.3%	95.2%	93.4%	3.7	3.7	3.9	3.7	2.7	2.7	3.0	2.7

There are two caveats to these data:

- (i) The overall average numbers of A* grades at A-Level throughout Tables 1.1-1.5 are for the period 2010-12, because A* grades at A-Level were not available beforehand. All other figures in Tables 1.1-1.4 are for 2009-12.
- (ii) The overall average numbers of A grades at A-Level are not presented in Tables 1.1-1.4 because, with the introduction of the A* grade in 2010, the number of A grades at A-Level dropped as top-flight students went on to achieve a mixture of As and A*s. In Table 1.5, the average numbers of A grades at A-Level for 2009 are offered alongside the overall average numbers of A* grades for 2010-12, so that some comparison of top-grade performance may be drawn.

Having stated these caveats, the following points may be noted from these five tables:

- (a) Welsh applicants to Cambridge have, on average, a higher number of A*s at GCSE than English, Northern Irish, and UK applicants: 4.7, 4.4, 4.4, and 4.5, respectively. However, they also have the lowest average UMS: 88.7%, 89.3%, 92.3%, and 89.3%, respectively.
- (b) The same broad statements can be made of Welsh applicants rejected by Cambridge.
- (c) Welsh offer holders at Cambridge have, on average, a higher number of A*s at GCSE than English, Northern Irish, and UK applicants: 5.7, 5.2, 5.0, and 5.2, respectively. Their average UMS is higher than English and UK applicants, but lower than Northern Irish applicants: 93.1%, 92.9%, 92.9%, and 95.2%, respectively.
- (d) Welsh entrants to Cambridge have, on average, a higher number of A*s at GCSE than English, Northern Irish, and UK applicants: 5.8, 5.3, 5.0, and 5.3, respectively. Their average UMS is in line with English entrants, but lower than UK and Northern Irish entrants: 93.3%, 93.3%, 93.4%, and 95.2%, respectively.

These data, and particularly the overall averages collated in Table 1.5, are instructive because they confirm some of the concerns highlighted in Section 2 of 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base'. At the point of application, Welsh applicants on average have relatively low UMS, and it is notable that the Welsh applicants rejected by Cambridge on average have lower UMS than their counterparts in England and Northern Ireland. The decline in Wales from upper-end performance at GCSE to upper-end performance at A-Level (and by implication at AS-Level), which is drawn out in 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base', is thus in evidence in Welsh applications to Cambridge. Based on the overall average UMS figures presented in Table 1.5, one would predict that, in the assessed period, Welsh applicants would perform less well in Cambridge admissions than English applicants, who would in turn perform less well than Northern Irish applicants. This is exactly the pattern shown in CAO's admissions returns for all educational sectors for the target years.

Table 1.6: Entrance rates of Cambridge applicants, 2009-12⁴

Year	Country	# Applicants	# Entrants	Success Rate
2009	W	287	59	20.6%
	E	10,006	2635	26.3%
	NI	222	73	32.9%
2010	W	290	65	22.4%
	E	9,452	2528	26.7%
	NI	200	66	33.0%
2011	W	247	57	23.1%
	E	8,961	2415	27.0%
	NI	212	63	29.7%
2012	W	269	60	22.3%
	E	9,040	2499	27.6%
	NI	199	57	28.6%
Average	W	273	60	22.0%
	E	9,365	2519	26.9%
	NI	208	65	31.1%

Having observed this, it is reassuring to note from Table 1.5 that Welsh offer holders and entrants to Cambridge are, in terms of academic performance, essentially in line with their counterparts in England and Northern Ireland. On average, they have a marginally higher number of A*s at GCSE, and Northern Irish offer holders and entrants on average have higher UMS than Welsh and English offer holders, but these are both predictable based on similar trends at the point of application. There is no discernible difference at AS- and A-Level between average Welsh and average English entrants to Cambridge. They present identical UMS at the point of application (93.3%) and, since 2010, they have gone on to attain identical numbers of A*s at A-Level (2.7).⁵

There remains a question, however, about whether the relatively low UMS performance of average Welsh applicants to Cambridge is sufficient to explain their relatively low acceptance rate to the University. The difference between the 88.7% and 89.3% UMS of

⁴ Derived from http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2009-10/special/15/table2_1.pdf [accessed 03/04/14], p. 1, http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2010-11/special/14/undergrad_stats.pdf [accessed 03/04/14], p. 7, <http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/statistics/archive/admissionsstatistics2011.pdf> [accessed 03/04/14], p. 6, and <http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/publications/docs/admissionsstatistics2012.pdf> [accessed 03/04/14], p. 5.

⁵ In 2009, prior to the introduction of A* at A-Level, they also went on to attain identical numbers of As at A-Level (3.7), though this observation should be used advisedly because it is only for one year of data.

average Welsh and English applicants, respectively, is, on the face of it, small, yet the difference between the success rates of average Welsh and English applicants is relatively large: 22.0% and 26.9%, respectively. Some additional factors are worth considering.

In spite of the fact that Wales' average upper-end GCSE performance is relatively low when compared with English and Northern Ireland (as shown in Section 2 of 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base'), Welsh applicants to Cambridge are actually on average stronger at GCSE than English and Northern Irish applicants. The fact that they subsequently tend to present relatively low UMS suggests that they should experience, as they do, a relatively high attrition rate in admissions, because they on average present a relatively large fall in attainment from the end of Year 11 to (for the majority) the end of Year 12: a measure which is mission-critical for Cambridge. By comparison, Northern Irish applicants, from relatively humble attainment at GCSE, on average present a relatively large rise in attainment from the end of Year 11 to the end of Year 12, and should thus be, as they are, relatively attractive as prospective Cambridge entrants.

This suggests a twofold problem: first, the relatively low upper-end attainment rate in Wales after GCSE, identified in 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base'; secondly, Cambridge's dissemination in Wales of information about what it is looking for in strong prospective applicants. Addressing the first point is beyond the remit of the Oxbridge Ambassador project, but its implications are important to note. Allowing that Welsh applicants to Cambridge on average present relatively strong GCSE performance at the point of application, a degree of self-selection would appear to be discouraging Welsh applicants with fewer A*s at GCSE from applying. One would predict that this would be because such applicants would on average have concomitantly lower UMS, so it is by-and-large sensible that they are not applying. This observation, though, is speculative. What is clear is that Welsh applicants to Cambridge present a pronounced attainment disparity between Year 11 and Year 12, and that this likely causes them difficulties in the University's admissions process. Why this gap exists and what can be done to address it requires further investigation by Welsh Government.

The second point is an extension of the first, inasmuch as another interpretation of the above data could be that Welsh students are applying or being encouraged to apply to Cambridge on the basis of their GCSE rather than their UMS performance. Clearly, Welsh students who are relatively strong at GCSE are applying, which is good, but the imperative in the Cambridge admissions process for these applicants to exhibit concomitant or better UMS is either not being delivered on the ground or not being sufficiently explained by Cambridge (or both). Cambridge's marked increase in educational outreach to Wales, especially since the beginning of the academic year 2011-12, should in due course pay dividends with respect to information dissemination. Outstanding Welsh applicants to

Cambridge are clearly “out there” because they receive offers and enter the University. Again, when they do, they are, on average, precisely in line by UMS and number of A* grades at A-Level with their English peers. Cambridge accordingly needs to continue its endeavour to explain its admissions process, in order to solicit more of the right applicants from Wales, i.e., applicants who present strong UMS.

It is important to state that 2011 is an anomalous year in the above data, inasmuch as, in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, Welsh applicants to Cambridge and Welsh applicants rejected by Cambridge on average presented higher UMS than their English counterparts: 88.7% and 88.5%, and 87.1% and 86.5%, respectively. On this basis alone, one would have predicted that Welsh applicants should have experienced a marginally greater success rate than English applicants in 2011, but this is not borne out. True, the 2011 success rate of Welsh applicants is the highest in the assessed period (23.3%). However, the numbers of Welsh applicants and entrants in 2011 are also relatively low: 247 and 57, respectively. These observations could be dismissed as a statistical blip, highlighting the value of analysing overall averages across a number of years, from which we have noted a clear trend. They may, however, be explained by the relatively large fall in 2011 from the average Welsh applicant’s performance at GCSE to UMS (5.1A*s to 88.7%), compared with the average English applicant’s (4.5 A*s to 88.5%). From this, we may see that Welsh applicants in 2011 on average presented a proportionally greater drop in attainment than their English counterparts from the end of Year 11 to the end of Year 12. Other variables, of course, may have played their part too, including applicants’ performance at interview and the ability of interviewers to account for that performance. It is clear that, in order to understand Welsh interviewees and their backgrounds, Cambridge needs to secure annual contextual data for Welsh schools and colleges from Welsh Government, in a fashion which can be readily integrated into Cambridge’s reporting processes for its academic interviewers.

A final area to consider but for which we do not have data at the time of writing is the subjects which Welsh students apply to study at Cambridge. Given the high incidence of maintained sector institutions in Wales, which tend to host relatively more science than humanities applicants, one would predict that Wales would supply a relatively high number of science applicants when compared with England. Assuming this is correct, this would likely be an additional factor in Welsh applicants being less successful on average than English applicants, because successful science applicants tend to present with higher UMS than successful humanities applicants.⁶ Availability in Wales of appropriate A-Level combinations for prospective scientists could also have a role to play, especially where schools and colleges are unable to facilitate A-Level combinations of three or more sciences, and/or Further Mathematics for mathematically-orientated applicants. This availability (or lack thereof) will become an increasing problem in the future if schools and colleges in

⁶ A fact which has recently been reflected in Cambridge changing its standard offer for science subjects from A*AA to A*A*A at A-Level, from the forthcoming UCAS application cycle.

Wales start or are encouraged to favour combinations leading to two A-Levels and Welsh Baccalaureate. In this instance, science applicants especially are unlikely to develop a sufficiently robust technical background from such a limited portfolio to enable them to access competitive-for-entry academic HE.

Section 2: Oxford

In contrast with Cambridge, Oxford requires applicants for the majority of degrees to complete a pre-interview subject-specific admissions test. These tests were piloted over a number of years but were introduced in substance to the University's admissions process during the academic year 2009-10. Performance in such tests, alongside contextualized GCSE results (when applicants present GCSEs, as the majority of UK applicants do), form the basis of Oxford's shortlisting for interview and subsequent admissions decisions. This approach is more usual than Cambridge's, inasmuch as many UK universities review applicants' performance in some form of written test to help inform admissions decisions, especially in competitive subjects. Such tests provide universities with a standardized indicator of potential for all applicants to any given subject, irrespective of the applicants' educational backgrounds. Details about Oxford's admissions tests, including a number of past papers, are available on the University's website for prospective undergraduates.⁷

When reviewing the performance of Welsh applicants in the Oxford admissions process, therefore, there are two datasets that must be considered: first, the upper-end performance of applicants at GCSE; secondly, the upper-end performance of applicants at GCSE, alongside performance in admissions tests. Given that each subject has its own test or a test shared with a number of related subjects, performance in admissions tests for which we have meaningful data will be analysed discretely by subject.

The following two tables compare the performance of Welsh and UK (including Scottish) applicants to Oxford for the period 2008-12. For whole period, they show, by number of A*s at GCSE, the total numbers of applicants, short-listed applicants, offer holders, and entrants. Total numbers, rather than average numbers or a year-by-year breakdown, are compared here because otherwise the numbers of Welsh applicants presenting lower and upper GCSE performance would on occasion be too small to be recorded without suppression. The tables also show, by numbers of A*s at GCSE, the rates of applicants who were shortlisted, received offers, and entered the University. They also show the percentages of the overall total numbers of applicants, offer holders, and entrants who presented given numbers of A*s at GCSE. A breakdown of data for applicants who achieved more than 13 A*s at GCSE is not included, to preserve anonymity, nor is a breakdown of data for applicants who did not present GCSEs, because we are here focussing on GCSEs as the majority qualification presented by the assessed cohort. However, for information, figures for these latter groups are still incorporated in the overall total numbers of applicants who applied, were shortlisted, and received offers across the assessed period. Again, the figures presented are aggregated for all applicable educational sectors: maintained, independent, secondary, tertiary, and other.

⁷ For example, http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/applying_to_oxford/tests/ [accessed 03/04/14]

Table 2.1: Academic attainment of Oxford applicants from Wales (including short-listed, offer holders, and entrants), 2008-12

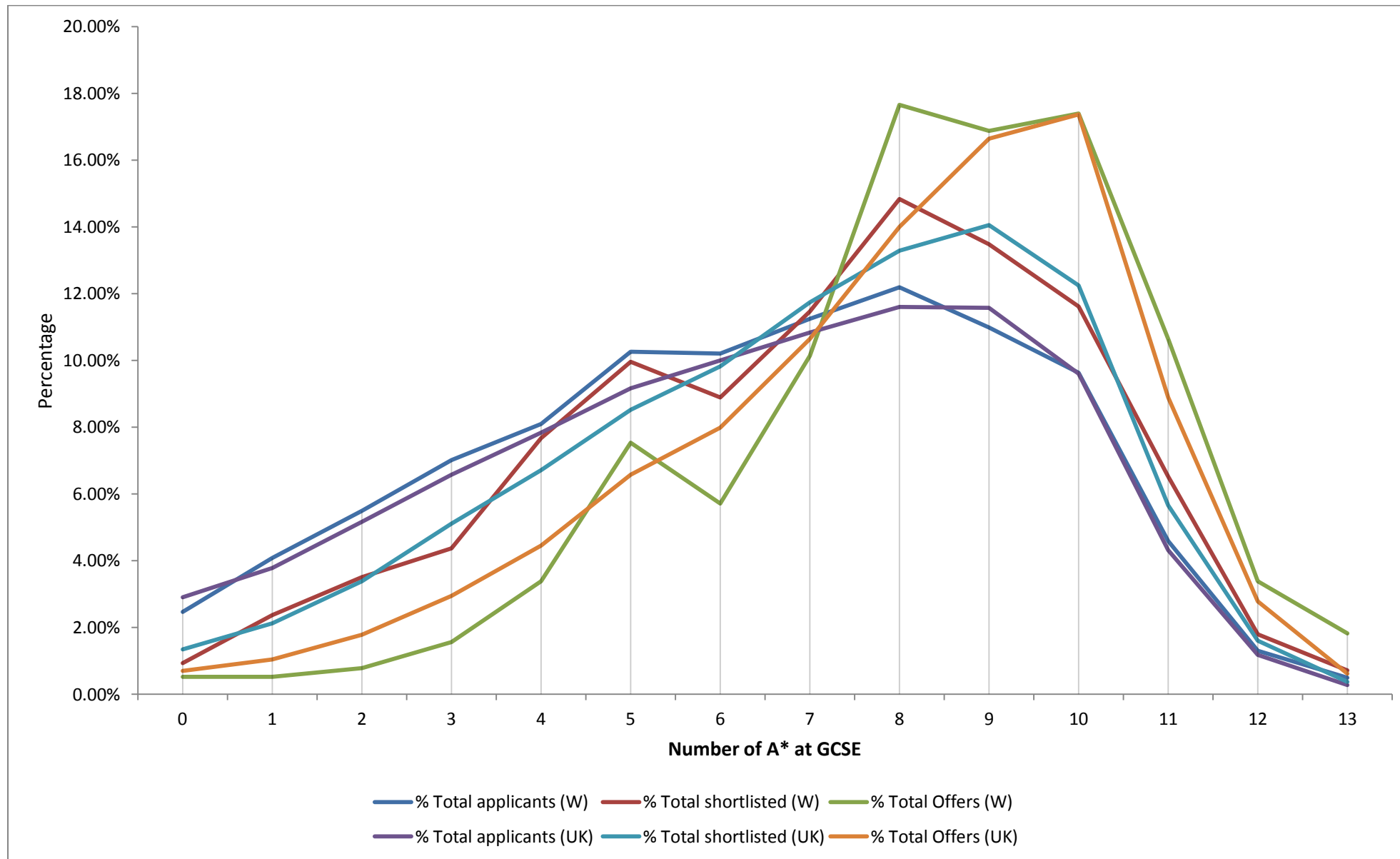
	GCSE A*s	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	# Entrants	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate	Entrance Rate	% Total Applicants	% Total Shortlisted	% Total Offers
2008-12	0	55	13	3	2	23.64%	5.45%	3.64%	2.47%	0.93%	0.52%
	1	91	33	2	2	36.26%	2.20%	2.20%	4.09%	2.37%	0.52%
	2	122	49	4	3	40.16%	3.28%	2.46%	5.49%	3.51%	0.78%
	3	156	61	6	6	39.10%	3.85%	3.85%	7.02%	4.37%	1.56%
	4	180	107	18	13	59.44%	10.00%	7.22%	8.10%	7.67%	3.38%
	5	228	139	35	29	60.96%	15.35%	12.72%	10.26%	9.96%	7.53%
	6	227	124	26	22	54.63%	11.45%	9.69%	10.21%	8.89%	5.71%
	7	250	160	42	39	64.00%	16.80%	15.60%	11.25%	11.47%	10.13%
	8	271	207	76	68	76.38%	28.04%	25.09%	12.19%	14.84%	17.66%
	9	244	188	66	65	77.05%	27.05%	26.64%	10.98%	13.48%	16.88%
	10	214	162	69	67	75.70%	32.24%	31.31%	9.63%	11.61%	17.40%
	11	102	91	42	41	89.22%	41.18%	40.20%	4.59%	6.52%	10.65%
	12	29	25	13	13	86.21%	44.83%	44.83%	1.30%	1.79%	3.38%
13	11	10	7	7	90.91%	63.64%	63.64%	0.49%	0.72%	1.82%	
2008-12 Total		2223	1395	419	385	62.75%	18.85%	17.32%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 2.2: Academic attainment of Oxford applicants from the UK (including short-listed, offer holders, and entrants), 2008-12

	GCSE A*s	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	# Entrants	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate	Entrance Rate	% Total Applicants	% Total Shortlisted	% Total Offers
2008-12	0	1659	528	102	84	31.83%	6.15%	5.06%	2.90%	1.35%	0.70%
	1	2162	831	152	124	38.44%	7.03%	5.74%	3.78%	2.12%	1.05%
	2	2962	1326	258	204	44.77%	8.71%	6.89%	5.17%	3.38%	1.78%
	3	3769	2004	427	363	53.17%	11.33%	9.63%	6.58%	5.11%	2.94%
	4	4485	2631	646	561	58.66%	14.40%	12.51%	7.83%	6.71%	4.45%
	5	5245	3339	956	851	63.66%	18.23%	16.22%	9.16%	8.52%	6.58%
	6	5725	3850	1159	1040	67.25%	20.24%	18.17%	10.00%	9.82%	7.98%
	7	6203	4604	1547	1426	74.22%	24.94%	22.99%	10.83%	11.74%	10.65%
	8	6645	5213	2034	1920	78.45%	30.61%	28.89%	11.60%	13.29%	14.00%
	9	6629	5509	2418	2324	83.10%	36.48%	35.06%	11.58%	14.05%	16.64%
	10	5499	4798	2523	2426	87.25%	45.88%	44.12%	9.60%	12.24%	17.37%
	11	2471	2219	1292	1256	89.80%	52.29%	50.83%	4.32%	5.66%	8.89%
	12	678	632	404	387	93.22%	59.59%	57.08%	1.18%	1.61%	2.78%
13	160	146	90	84	91.25%	56.25%	52.50%	0.28%	0.37%	0.62%	
2008-12 Total		57260	39213	14528	13512	68.48%	25.37%	23.60%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

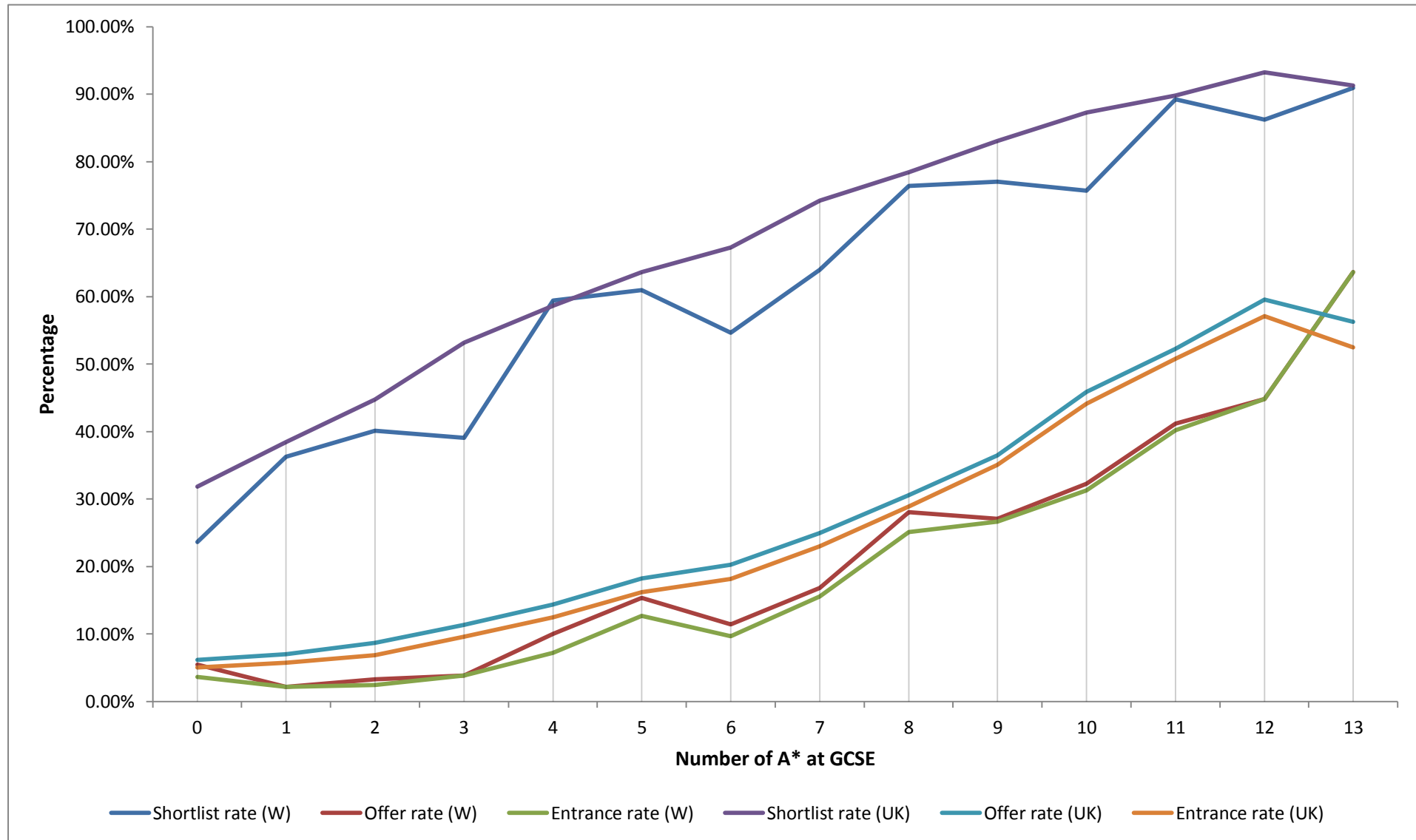
Overall, these data confirm some predictable trends, i.e., that the majority of Oxford applicants from Wales and the UK present strong GCSE performance at the point of application, and that applicants presenting stronger GCSEs are by-and-large likely more to be successful at each stage of the admissions process. These trends, and any observable anomalies in them, are easier to interrogate when the data are broken down and represented graphically.

Chart 2.3: Percentages of total numbers of Oxford applicants, shortlisted and offered by GCSE performance, 2008-12



This chart gives a clear sense of the GCSE attainment presented by Welsh and UK applicants to Oxford during the assessed period. Both groups are fundamentally similar and show no significant variation. On average, therefore, it appears that Oxford applicants from Wales present similar performance at GCSE as Oxford applicants from the UK. The contextual value of excellent GCSEs is obvious: the bulk of applicants from Wales and the UK attained 5-10 A*, but bulk of entrants attained 7-11 A*s.

Chart 2.4: Rates of Oxford applicants shortlisted, offered, and entered, by GCSE performance, 2008-12



The following points may be noted from this chart:

- (a) As stated with respect to Table 2.1, Welsh and UK applicants to Oxford during the assessed period followed comparable progression trends at each stage of the admissions process.
- (b) Allowing in broad terms for (a), Welsh applicants to Oxford who attained 3, 6, 7, 9, and 10 A*s were shortlisted at substantially lower rates than their UK counterparts.
- (c) Again allowing for (a), there are disparities (some marked) between the rates of Welsh and UK applicants who received offers from and ultimately entered Oxford. Given that the entrance disparities effectively follow the pattern of the offer disparities, it is the offer disparities that require further thought.

Performance in admissions tests could account for some of the attrition highlighted in (b), so this is an important point to remember in our subsequent analysis of admissions test data. Some of the offer disparities highlighted in (c) may be attributable to the fact that they follow the pattern of the shortlist disparities, e.g., the relative trough at 6 A*s, and the relative peak at 8 A*s. However, to consider the picture in more detail, we need to identify more particularly whether Welsh applicants received offers at the same rate as UK applicants with comparable GCSE profiles *after shortlisting*. The following table makes this comparison.

Table 2.5: Offer rates after shortlisting of Oxford applicants, by GCSE performance, 2008-12

	GCSE A*s	Wales			UK		
		# Shortlisted	# Offers	Offer Rate	# Shortlisted	# Offers	Offer Rate
2008-12	0	13	3	23.08%	528	102	19.32%
	1	33	2	6.06%	831	152	18.29%
	2	49	4	8.16%	1326	258	19.46%
	3	61	6	9.84%	2004	427	21.31%
	4	107	18	16.82%	2631	646	24.55%
	5	139	35	25.18%	3339	956	28.63%
	6	124	26	20.97%	3850	1159	30.10%
	7	160	42	26.25%	4604	1547	33.60%
	8	207	76	36.71%	5213	2034	39.02%
	9	188	66	35.11%	5509	2418	43.89%
	10	162	69	42.59%	4798	2523	52.58%
	11	91	42	46.15%	2219	1292	58.22%
	12	25	13	52.00%	632	404	63.92%
	13	10	7	70.00%	146	90	61.64%
2008-12 Total		1395	419	30.04%	39213	14528	37.05%

These data are instructive because they apparently confirm the inference in Section 1 of ‘Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base’, that Welsh applicants to Oxford are regarded on average as holistically less strong than UK applicants when reviewed after interview. For the assessed period, at virtually every level, and allowing that shortlisted Welsh applicants are a relatively small sample when compared with shortlisted UK applicants, a shortlisted Welsh applicant at Oxford was less likely to receive an offer after interview than a shortlisted UK applicant presenting comparable GCSEs. In some cases, the difference between the two cohorts is striking, e.g., at 6 A*s and from 9 to 12 A*s. The only exceptions are at 0 and 13 A*s at GCSE, where the numbers of Welsh applicants who were shortlisted and received offers are sufficiently small to be of dubious statistical value.

This consistent disparity is not necessarily attributable to interview alone, inasmuch as applicant profiles are reviewed in their entirety after interview before final decisions are made. However, it does confirm that shortlisted Welsh applicants are on average drawn down more than their comparably-qualified UK counterparts during Oxford’s final assessment of them by some combination of their application paperwork (potentially

including a further review of their attainment in admissions tests) and their performance at interview.

On the strength of these data, then, three areas of support are needed to allow Welsh applicants to perform on a par in the Oxford admissions process with their UK counterparts presenting comparable GCSEs. First, as with Cambridge, Oxford needs to continue explaining its admissions process through coordinated outreach work, to allow Welsh students and the teachers who support them to make informed (and hopefully therefore realistic) applications to the University. Secondly, again like Cambridge, Oxford needs to continue to secure annual contextual data for Welsh schools and colleges from Welsh Government, in a fashion which can be readily integrated into its reporting processes for its academic interviewers. Thirdly, Welsh Government needs to consider integrating discursive academic super-curricular activities into its educational programmes at secondary and tertiary level, to ensure that academically-gifted Welsh students have an appropriate opportunity to develop their verbal argumentation skills to match their performance in written examinations. Noting the particular disparities in the offer rates after shortlisting between Welsh and UK applicants to Oxford presenting 9 to 12 A*s at GCSE, it would seem that there is an especial problem at the very top end. This suggests that the holistic underperformance of shortlisted Welsh applicants after interview is proportionally more noticeable amongst the outstandingly qualified.

Having made these general observations, we will turn now to subjects for which OUAO has provided a breakdown of applicant performance data which include results in admissions tests. These subjects are English Language and Literature,⁸ History,⁹ Law,¹⁰ Medicine, and degrees requiring the Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA).¹¹ For English and History, Oxford uses in-house admissions tests: the English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT) and the History Admission Test (HAT). The other tests involved are all routinely used by other universities: the National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT), BMAT for Medicine and related subjects, and TSA for a variety of disciplines in which broad critical thinking is highly prized.

The following tables display these data broken down by country. As before, Scotland is not shown because the majority of Scottish applicants do not present GCSEs and would accordingly make for ineffective comparators. However, for completeness, Scottish figures are incorporated into the recording of UK data. We will focus upon the years in which admissions tests have routinely been used by Oxford, i.e., from 2009-10 to 2011-12, and we believe the figures presented are aggregated for all applicable educational sectors: maintained, independent, secondary, tertiary, and other. Finally, all these data come with

⁸ Including Joint Honours degrees in English, apart from English and History.

⁹ Including Joint Honours degrees in History.

¹⁰ Including Law Studies in Europe.

¹¹ Including, for the assessed period, Economics and Management, Experimental Psychology, and Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE).

the substantial caveat that the Welsh and Northern Irish figures are small, and may therefore result in shortlist and offer rate distortions.

Table 2.6: Applicants to read English at Oxford, 2010-12

Year	Country	Avg ELAT Banding (App)	Avg ELAT Banding (SL)	Avg ELAT Banding (Off)	Avg # GCSE A*s (App)	Avg # GCSE A*s (SL)	Avg # GCSE A*s (Off)	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate After Shortlisting	Offer Rate
2010	W	2.88	2.58	1.86	6.16	6.63	7.00	58	38	7	65.5%	18.4%	12.1%
	E	2.64	2.32	1.90	6.15	6.94	7.85	1226	852	244	69.5%	28.6%	19.9%
	NI	2.69	2.45	2.00	5.71	5.83	7.00	14	12	2	85.7%	16.7%	14.3%
	UK	2.66	2.33	1.90	6.15	6.92	7.83	1324	921	256	69.6%	27.8%	0.3%
2011	W	3.03	2.77	1.00	5.84	6.89	8.00	38	27	1	71.1%	3.7%	2.6%
	E	2.55	2.24	1.86	6.15	6.82	7.63	1088	788	246	72.4%	31.2%	22.6%
	NI	2.78	2.38	2.20	5.11	5.77	7.60	18	13	5	72.2%	38.5%	27.8%
	UK	2.57	2.25	1.86	6.12	6.80	7.63	1160	838	255	72.2%	30.4%	22.0%
2012	W	3.04	2.71	2.22	6.36	7.38	9.00	52	31	9	59.6%	29.0%	17.3%
	E	2.61	2.34	1.97	6.47	7.37	7.98	1148	800	246	69.7%	30.8%	21.4%
	NI	2.78	2.00	2.00	5.56	5.80	9.00	9	5	1	55.6%	20.0%	11.1%
	UK	2.63	2.35	1.98	6.46	7.36	8.01	1230	851	260	69.2%	30.6%	21.1%
Avg	W	2.98	2.69	1.69	6.12	6.97	8.00	49	32	6	64.9%	17.7%	11.5%
	E	2.60	2.30	1.91	6.26	7.04	7.82	1154	813	245	70.5%	30.2%	21.3%
	NI	2.75	2.28	2.07	5.46	5.80	7.87	14	10	3	73.2%	26.7%	19.5%
	UK	2.62	2.31	1.91	6.24	7.03	7.82	1238	870	257	70.3%	29.5%	20.8%

(NB, Lower ELAT scores are better)

Table 2.7: Applicants to read History at Oxford, 2010-12

Year	Country	Avg HAT (App)	Avg HAT (SL)	Avg HAT (Off)	Avg # GCSE A*s (App)	Avg # GCSE A*s (SL)	Avg # GCSE A*s (Off)	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate After Shortlisting	Offer Rate
2010	W	49.36	62.85	71.60	5.69	5.75	6.20	39	20	5	51.3%	25.0%	12.8%
	E	57.29	64.31	70.43	6.21	6.65	7.82	1387	998	308	72.0%	30.9%	22.2%
	NI	56.91	64.38	65.50	4.36	3.50	3.50	11	8	6	72.7%	75.0%	54.5%
	UK	57.12	64.27	70.41	6.17	6.60	7.72	1466	1050	327	71.6%	31.1%	22.3%
2011	W	50.92	59.67	66.38	5.81	6.85	8.88	50	27	8	54.0%	29.6%	16.0%
	E	56.54	61.88	67.47	6.37	7.15	7.88	1280	923	309	72.1%	33.5%	24.1%
	NI	53.18	65.14	66.00	5.90	6.67	6.80	11	7	5	63.6%	71.4%	45.5%
	UK	56.33	61.85	67.46	6.35	7.14	7.89	1367	976	329	71.4%	33.7%	24.1%
2012	W	50.64	56.73	62.71	6.20	6.93	7.29	40	27	7	67.5%	25.9%	17.5%
	E	55.76	61.26	66.42	6.62	7.47	8.29	1297	910	312	70.2%	34.3%	24.1%
	NI	56.67	58.00	55.00	5.67	6.38	9.00	9	8	2	88.9%	25.0%	22.2%
	UK	55.71	61.20	66.36	6.59	7.44	8.28	1382	970	331	70.2%	34.1%	24.0%
Avg	W	50.31	59.75	66.90	5.90	6.51	7.45	43	25	7	57.4%	27.0%	15.5%
	E	56.53	62.48	68.11	6.40	7.09	8.00	1321	944	310	71.4%	32.8%	23.4%
	NI	55.59	62.51	62.17	5.31	5.51	6.43	10	8	4	74.2%	56.5%	41.9%
	UK	56.39	62.44	68.08	6.37	7.06	7.96	1405	999	329	71.1%	32.9%	23.4%

(NB, Higher HAT scores are better)

Table 2.8: Applicants to read Law at Oxford, 2010-12

Year	Country	Avg LNAT Mul (App)	Avg LNAT Mul (SL)	Avg LNAT Mul (Off)	Avg LNAT Ess (App)	Avg LNAT Ess (SL)	Avg LNAT Ess (Off)	Avg # GCSE A*s (App)	Avg # GCSE A*s (SL)	Avg # GCSE A*s (Off)	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate After Shortlisting	Offer Rate
2010	W	17.37	19.29	20.78	60.69	61.96	62.89	5.78	7.61	8.50	52	24	9	46.2%	37.5%	17.3%
	E	17.79	19.93	20.75	61.83	64.35	65.49	5.39	7.54	8.46	841	380	154	45.2%	40.5%	18.3%
	NI	17.67	19.36	18.50	62.88	65.29	67.83	6.12	8.21	8.60	27	15	6	55.6%	40.0%	22.2%
	UK	17.82	19.88	20.70	61.77	64.10	65.19	5.42	7.57	8.47	962	445	179	46.3%	40.2%	18.6%
2011	W	18.58	21.60	25.50	60.64	62.36	64.63	6.55	8.28	8.88	50	25	8	50.0%	32.0%	16.0%
	E	19.23	22.14	23.30	62.20	64.28	65.11	5.74	7.72	8.18	838	388	162	46.3%	41.8%	19.3%
	NI	20.65	23.76	24.11	59.84	61.65	62.89	5.81	7.76	8.78	31	17	9	54.8%	52.9%	29.0%
	UK	19.26	22.16	23.46	62.03	63.99	64.92	5.77	7.75	8.24	956	449	183	47.0%	40.8%	19.1%
2012	W	18.68	20.76	23.22	60.53	62.84	62.89	5.64	7.68	8.78	58	25	9	43.1%	36.0%	15.5%
	E	20.42	23.20	24.51	60.67	62.57	63.40	6.18	7.82	8.34	809	423	169	52.3%	40.0%	20.9%
	NI	20.07	23.00	24.33	57.79	65.67	65.67	6.07	7.17	7.33	14	6	3	42.9%	50.0%	21.4%
	UK	20.32	23.10	24.47	60.69	62.68	63.46	6.13	7.80	8.35	918	474	188	51.6%	39.7%	20.5%
Avg	W	18.21	20.55	23.17	60.62	62.39	63.47	5.99	7.86	8.72	53	25	9	46.3%	35.1%	16.3%
	E	19.15	21.76	22.85	61.57	63.73	64.66	5.77	7.69	8.33	829	397	162	47.9%	40.7%	19.5%
	NI	19.46	22.04	22.31	60.17	64.20	65.46	6.00	7.72	8.24	24	13	6	52.8%	47.4%	25.0%
	UK	19.13	21.71	22.88	61.50	63.59	64.52	5.77	7.71	8.35	945	456	183	48.2%	40.2%	19.4%

(NB, Higher LNAT scores are better)

Table 2.9: Applicants to read Medicine at Oxford, 2010-12

Year	Country	Avg Med BMAT (App)	Avg Med BMAT (SL)	Avg Med BMAT (Off)	Avg Med Logodds (App)	Avg Med Logodds (SL)	Avg Med Logodds (Off)	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate After Shortlisting	Offer Rate
2010	W	52.75	58.66	60.57	0.49	1.34	1.47	49	23	7	46.9%	30.4%	14.3%
	E	52.40	62.10	65.09	0.07	1.24	1.50	983	332	138	33.8%	41.6%	14.0%
	NI	54.42	60.15	67.50	0.56	1.14	1.67	20	10	4	50.0%	40.0%	20.0%
	UK	52.51	61.83	64.95	0.11	1.25	1.52	1078	380	153	35.3%	40.3%	14.2%
2011	W	55.42	62.87	67.46	0.20	1.48	1.92	50	15	4	30.0%	26.7%	8.0%
	E	56.69	65.27	67.83	0.10	1.22	1.46	996	336	138	33.7%	41.1%	13.9%
	NI	51.07	54.17	-	-0.38	0.93	-	17	3	0	17.6%	0.0%	0.0%
	UK	56.55	65.06	67.79	0.10	1.23	1.48	1091	368	148	33.7%	40.2%	13.6%
2012	W	54.22	62.10	64.20	0.09	1.09	1.09	47	12	5	25.5%	41.7%	10.6%
	E	56.32	65.64	68.33	0.07	1.21	1.40	996	325	139	32.6%	42.8%	14.0%
	NI	56.19	66.28	65.46	0.34	1.32	1.37	16	6	4	37.5%	66.7%	25.0%
	UK	56.15	65.47	68.05	0.07	1.20	1.38	1088	352	151	32.4%	42.9%	13.9%
Avg	W	54.13	61.21	64.08	0.26	1.30	1.49	49	17	5	34.2%	32.0%	11.0%
	E	55.13	64.34	67.08	0.08	1.22	1.45	992	331	138	33.4%	41.8%	13.9%
	NI	53.89	60.20	44.32	0.17	1.13	1.01	18	6	3	35.8%	42.1%	15.1%
	UK	55.07	64.12	66.93	0.09	1.23	1.46	1086	367	151	33.8%	41.1%	13.9%

(NB, Higher BMAT scores are better)

Table 2.10: Applicants to read subjects requiring TSA at Oxford, 2010-12

Year	Country	Avg TSA (App)	Avg TSA (SL)	Avg TSA (Off)	Avg # GCSE A*s (App)	Avg # GCSE A*s (SL)	Avg # GCSE A*s (Off)	# Applicants	# Shortlisted	# Offers	Shortlist Rate	Offer Rate After Shortlisting	Offer Rate
2010	W	57.05	59.18	63.41	5.49	6.37	5.86	38	19	7	50.0%	36.8%	18.4%
	E	59.34	63.41	66.27	6.43	7.52	8.30	1487	784	284	52.7%	36.2%	19.1%
	NI	58.47	61.20		5.69	7.20		14	5	0	35.7%	0.0%	0.0%
	UK	59.30	63.30	66.22	6.40	7.50	8.24	1578	827	300	52.4%	36.3%	19.0%
2011	W	60.09	66.22	70.38	6.40	8.00	8.85	55	28	13	50.9%	46.4%	23.6%
	E	62.05	66.22	69.02	6.56	7.82	8.60	1353	761	278	56.2%	36.5%	20.5%
	NI	60.30	64.59	66.55	5.15	6.33	8.00	20	9	2	45.0%	22.2%	10.0%
	UK	62.00	66.23	69.07	6.53	7.81	8.61	1475	828	304	56.1%	36.7%	20.6%
2012	W	60.88	64.90	70.31	6.17	7.95	8.86	37	21	8	56.8%	38.1%	21.6%
	E	62.76	67.13	70.18	6.75	7.81	8.51	1449	816	312	56.3%	38.2%	21.5%
	NI	60.85	65.49	66.95	6.09	7.50	7.75	23	10	4	43.5%	40.0%	17.4%
	UK	62.62	67.04	70.09	6.73	7.81	8.50	1540	856	329	55.6%	38.4%	21.4%
Avg	W	59.34	63.43	68.04	6.02	7.44	7.85	43	23	9	52.3%	41.2%	21.5%
	E	61.38	65.59	68.49	6.58	7.72	8.47	1430	787	291	55.0%	37.0%	20.4%
	NI	59.87	63.76	44.50	5.64	7.01	5.25	19	8	2	42.1%	25.0%	10.5%
	UK	61.31	65.52	68.46	6.55	7.70	8.45	1531	837	311	54.7%	37.2%	20.3%

(NB, Higher TSA scores are better)

From these five tables, and allowing for the fact that the data presented in Table 2.9 do not include GCSE performance, the following points may be noted:

- (a) On average, for the assessed period, Welsh applicants to all these subjects in Oxford attained less strong results than the UK average in the target admissions tests. They also presented a lower number of A*s at GCSE than the UK average, with the exception of Law¹². Predictably, therefore, they were shortlisted at a lower rate than the UK average in every subject (with the exception of Medicine).
- (b) On average, for the assessed period, shortlisted Welsh applicants to all these subjects in Oxford attained less strong results than the UK average in the target admissions tests. They also presented a lower number of A*s at GCSE than the UK average, with the exception of Law. Predictably, therefore, their offer rates after shortlisting were lower than the UK average in every subject (with the exception of TSA subjects).
- (c) On average, for the assessed period, offer holding Welsh applicants in all these subjects in Oxford attained less strong results than the UK average in the target admissions tests, with the exception of English. They presented a higher number of A*s at GCSE than the UK average in English and Law, and a lower number of A*s at GCSE than the UK average in History and TSA subjects.

Mindful again that the Welsh and Northern Irish numbers are small, these trends are nonetheless instructive. By and large, at each stage of the application process, Welsh applicants presented less strong results than the UK average in all considered admissions tests and the majority of GCSE measures. It is therefore predictable that they would be, as they were, shortlisted and made offers at lower rates than the UK average. There are some exceptions, such as the relatively strong GCSE performance of Law applicants from Wales. The likely reason for these applicants not performing better in the admissions process is their relatively low performance in LNAT. The fact that Medicine applicants from Wales were shortlisted at a rate above the UK average, in spite of their relatively low performance in BMAT, may be attributed to their consistently high logodds at each stage of the admissions process.¹³ These suggest that the sampled Welsh applicants in Medicine came from schools which on average presented relatively low performance at GCSE,¹⁴ an evidently important contextual factor in their overall logodds score. The relatively low offer rates after shortlisting of all Welsh applicants, with the exception of those in TSA subjects

¹² Medicine GCSE scores are not reported as these are represented within the overall logodds score.

¹³ Logodds scores are calculated using a 50:50 ratio of BMAT score and GCSE A* count contextualised for school or college performance. Applicants are ranked according to logodds score and those who do not make the initial shortlist are reviewed by tutors to take account of individual circumstances, both academic and non-academic, that might indicate that GCSE and/or BMAT performance is likely to have underestimated their potential. Applicants deemed worthy of further consideration are reviewed by a panel alongside applicants who are just below the initial shortlist cut off. Approximately 90% of the shortlist is formulaic based on logodds and 10% represents the safety net for applicants for whom logodds may not be representative.

¹⁴ Given what we know from the paper 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base' about the relatively low upper-end performance at GCSE of Welsh schools, this suggestion seems highly likely to be correct.

(which are anomalous), is likely attributable to a combination of relatively less strong attainment at GCSE and relatively less strong performance in interview.

In short, Tables 2.6-2.10 bear out some of what we found in Tables 2.1 and 2.5. For the assessed period, Welsh applicants were uniformly less strong than UK applicants in admissions tests at the point of application and after shortlisting. Performance in admissions tests is accordingly a likely reason that Welsh applicants to Oxford were shortlisted and received offers after interview at lower rates than their UK counterparts. In contrast with Tables 2.1 and 2.5, the samples covered in Tables 2.6-2.10 also suggest that applicants in English, History, and subjects requiring TSA have lately tended to present with lower numbers of A*s at GCSE than their UK peers.¹⁵ The fact that they were also shortlisted with lower numbers of A*s at GCSE, in addition to attaining relatively low performance in admissions tests, goes some additional way towards explaining their relatively low offer rates.

As with Cambridge, it is important to note that the gap in attainment narrows substantially by the time Welsh applicants to Oxford have received offers, although Oxford’s Welsh offer holders in the reviewed subjects still on the whole present lower results in admissions tests than the UK average. Critically, though, figures for the final A-Level performance of Oxford applicants show that Welsh and UK offer holders went on to achieve the same number of A*s at A-Level for the period 2010-12, as we found earlier was the case with Welsh and English entrants to Cambridge. The following table shows the average number of A-Level A*s achieved by applicants to, shortlisted applicants at, and offer holders at Oxford for the period 2010-12.

Table 2.11: Academic attainment at A-Level at each point of the Oxford application process, 2010-12

Year	Country	Applicants	Shortlisted	Offer Holders
2010	W	1.2	1.3	1.6
	UK	1.2	1.3	1.8
2011	W	1.3	1.5	2.0
	UK	1.4	1.6	2.0
2012	W	1.2	1.3	2.0
	UK	1.3	1.5	1.9
Avg	W	1.2	1.4	1.9
	UK	1.3	1.5	1.9

¹⁵ Law, of course, is notable anomaly to this, where Welsh applicants presented relatively strong GCSEs during the assessed period.

It is encouraging to see that, at the end of the admissions process, Oxford applicants from Wales are precisely in line by number of A* grades at A-Level with their UK peers.

Conclusions

This paper substantiates the pattern of low upper-end academic attainment in Wales identified in 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base', particularly after GCSE. In spite of Wales' relatively low upper-end performance at GCSE, Welsh applicants to Cambridge are actually relatively strong by GCSE in the University's UK gathered field. Welsh applicants to Oxford are either at parity or just below parity with their UK peers by GCSE in the University's UK gathered field. These facts are encouraging. They suggest that, by and large, the right Welsh students based on GCSE are applying to both universities.

However, as in 'Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base', the problem after GCSE is more pronounced. By a variety of measures, Welsh applicants to Oxford (admissions tests, and likely interviews) and Cambridge (average UMS, and possibly interviews) are, on average, empirically performing less strongly than their UK counterparts. In other words, from relatively good or at least sound GCSEs, Welsh applicants to Oxford and Cambridge tend to perform less well than their UK counterparts in post-16 admissions assessments which Oxford and Cambridge consider critical.

Making these latter observations is not to attribute responsibility for them to any one sector. Oxford and Cambridge need to continue explaining the particularities of their respective admissions processes to their target audiences in Wales (students, teachers, and parents), to ensure they recruit realistic applicants. Welsh Government needs to drive up student attainment, both at GCSE but more critically at AS- and A-Level. As part of this educational drive, it is imperative to facilitate discursive approaches to study, incorporating verbal academic argumentation and critical thinking, in order to boost the performance (and confidence) of Welsh students both in academic admissions tests and at interview. Such an approach will not only advantage academic Welsh students in applications to Oxford and Cambridge, but, perhaps more importantly, ensure that they are well prepared to apply to other competitive-for-entry academic HE institutions as well.