



BRIEFING PAPER

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Oxbridge 'elitism'

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Contents:

1. Type of school
2. Other indicators of equality and widening participation



Contents

Summary	2
1. Type of school	4
1.1 Types of state schools and colleges	5
State grammars and comprehensive schools	6
Further education sector colleges	6
1.2 Access agreement targets	6
1.3 Historical information	7
1.4 Individual schools and colleges	10
Sutton Trust analysis of entries from 2002 to 2009	10
Data on entry up to 2019	11
Individual state schools and colleges in England	13
2. Other indicators of equality and widening participation	14
2.1 Gender	14
2.2 Ethnicity	15
2.3 'Under-represented groups'	16
2.4 Students eligible for maintenance grants	17

Summary

For the last two decades both Oxford and Cambridge have taken more than half of their entrants from state schools. The latest rates are 67% for Oxford and 68% for Cambridge, or somewhat higher if overseas students at UK schools are excluded.

These rates have generally increased over the past few decades with particularly large increases in the last two years. The impact of the pandemic on school exam arrangements and grades led to an increase in overall entrants at both institutions in 2020 and particularly from state school pupils.

However, the historical data shows that progress has been slow. At the end of the 1920s around 20% of entrants to both universities started their education at a state school. In the late 1930s these rates were 24% at Oxford and 19% at Cambridge started their education at a state school. By the early 1950s these rates had increased to 43% and 34% respectively. In the early 1960s 34% of students at Oxford and 27% at Cambridge came from state secondary schools.

While the proportion of entrants from the state sector has increased, **students from a relatively small number of independent schools, state grammar schools and sixth form colleges make up a substantial proportion of entrants.** Students from ten schools/colleges make up around 10% of admissions at both universities. Half of entrants to both universities come from around 150 schools/colleges. **Few if any students at the majority of schools and colleges apply to either Oxford or Cambridge.**

Interest in the background of students who go to Oxford and Cambridge is nothing new. The 1852 Royal Commissions on both universities identified access by poorer students as an important and longstanding issue. The debate about elitism at Oxford and Cambridge has tended to focus on a single indicator –the proportion of students from state schools– and particularly whether it has gone up or down in the latest year. This gives a limited view. A fuller picture needs more context, including longer term trends in this indicator, rates of entry for other under-represented groups, data on other prestigious universities, the overall distribution of applications to and offers from Oxbridge by individual schools

and colleges and a better understanding of the different types of state schools that send pupils to Oxbridge.

The latest statistics on admissions can be viewed at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics>

<http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/apply/statistics>

Oxford University publishes a range of more detailed data in interactive tables. These includes the socio-economic background of entrants by college, entrants by local authority, Parliamentary Constituency, ethnicity, disadvantage and individual school/college. These are listed individually in each category on the [Undergraduate admissions statistics page](#) (under 'detailed statistics').

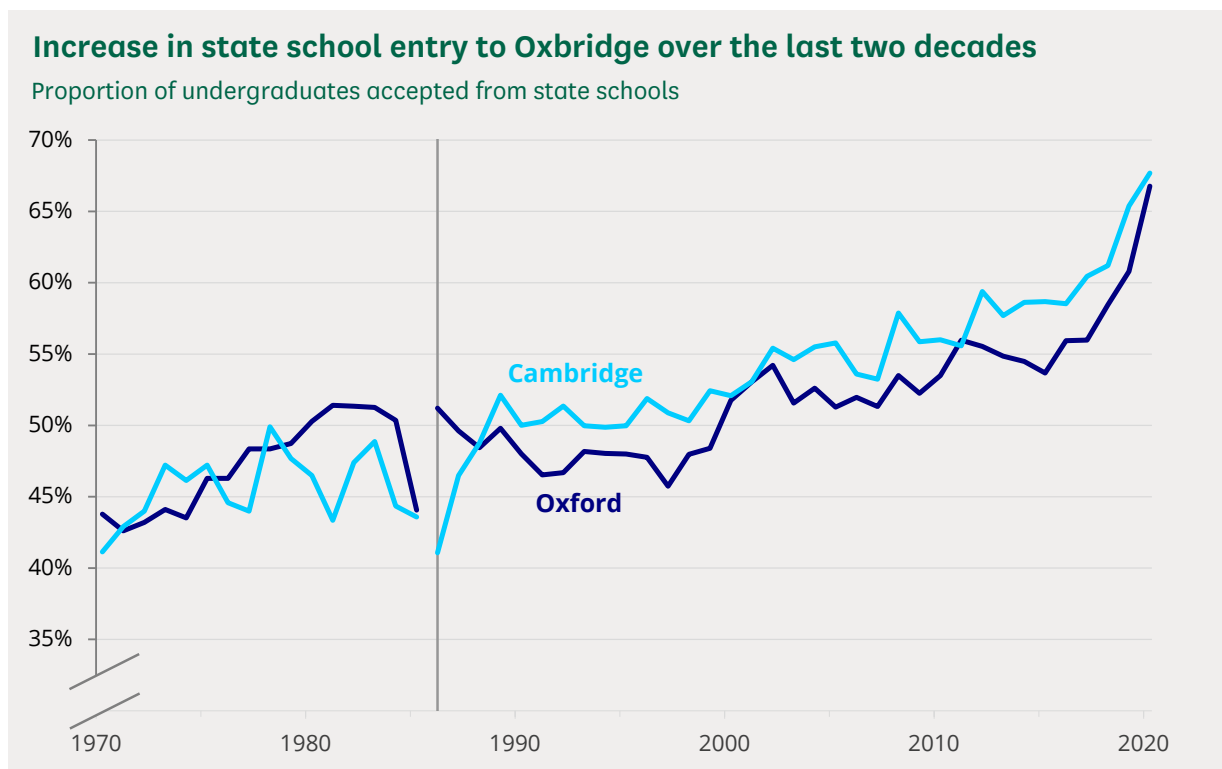
Cambridge University also publishes applications, offers and acceptances by individual school and college.

Readers may be interested in the Sutton Trust reports [Oxbridge Admissions](#) from 2016 and [Access to Advantage](#) from 2018 . Data from Freedom of Information requests on applications and entrance by local authority and socio-economic breakdowns can be found on [David Lammy MP's website](#). Higher Education Statistics Agency performance indicators on widening participation can be downloaded at: www.hesa.ac.uk/pi.

Office for Students publishes data on access, continuation, attainment and progression at individual universities in its [Access and participation data dashboard](#). This breaks down indicators by age, ethnicity and disability of students as well as the deprivation and past level of higher education participation of the local area they come from.

1. Type of school

The table at the end of this note shows consistent information on undergraduate intake by school and college type since 1989. The proportion of entrants from the state sector is illustrated below. This includes earlier data with a break in series.¹ The rate looks at entrants from the UK state sector (schools and colleges) as a proportion of total entrants from this sector and UK independent schools. It therefore excludes entrants from overseas schools, but will include some overseas nationals at UK institutions, particularly independent schools.



In the first half of the period there was a clear increase in the proportion of state school pupils entering Oxford. This increased from 43% in the early 1970s to 52% in 1981. The level at Cambridge was more erratic, varying between 45% and 50% for most of this period. The rate at both institutions fell noticeably in the mid-1980s. New definitions were brought in from 1986/87 and trends since then have been more stable. Cambridge overtook Oxford in 1988 and took a higher percentage of state school pupils in each subsequent year other than 2011. There was little change at either institution during the early/mid-1990s. Rates at both increased to more than 50% in the late 1990s and early part of this century. This increase has generally been sustained in recent years and both institutions saw record highs in each year from 2017 to 2020.

¹ Pre 1989 data from [HC Deb 5 December 1988 c4-7W](#) and [HL Deb 5 June 2003 c189WA](#)

The latest rates were 67.8% at Cambridge and 66.9% at Oxford. The 2020 applications cycle was greatly affected by the pandemic and associated restrictions. School examination results were awarded using centre-assessed grades which saw a substantial increase in the number receiving top grades. Both Oxford and Cambridge accepted many more students in 2020 than in previous years, up by around 400 and 470 respectively. These 'additional' students were more likely to be from maintained schools and hence the increases shown in the chart above.

The absolute number of state school entrants peaked in 2020 in both universities. The previous high was in 2002 in Oxford and 2019 at Cambridge

To put these figures in context Independent school leavers made up 9.6% of young (<20) accepted home applicants to higher education via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in 2020.²³

Applications from maintained school pupils make up a slightly larger share of total applications at Oxford and Cambridge—therefore *acceptance rates* are lower. In 2020 the acceptance rate for UK pupils from the maintained sector was 22.1% at Cambridge and 20.6% at Oxford; the acceptance rate for UK independent school pupils was 25.8% at Cambridge and 21.8% at Oxford.⁴

Complete state/independent breakdowns by Oxbridge college have been published for a number of years. Substantial variations exist between colleges, but the latest data shows that all accepted more than half of their intake from maintained schools other than one mature student college. At Cambridge in 2020 Robinson College had the lowest proportion of home acceptances from maintained school pupils at 59%. Jesus College the highest at 80%.⁵ With a relatively small number of new students at each college, some year-on-year variation should be expected. Data for individual colleges in individual years should therefore be treated with caution.

The three-year average up to 2020 by Oxford college showed that the proportion of acceptances made to maintained school pupils varied from 53% (Christ Church) to 94% (Mansfield).^{6 7}

1.1 Types of state schools and colleges

The earlier data on state school/college pupils covers applications from pupils at all UK state schools with sixth forms, including academies and free schools as well sixth form colleges and other further education sector institutions.

² Includes those who applied before the 30 June deadline only.

³ [UCAS end of cycle data resources 2020 2019](#)

⁴ [Undergraduate admissions statistics](#), University of Oxford; [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - 2020 cycle](#), University of Cambridge

⁵ [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - 2020 cycle](#), University of Cambridge. Highest maintained proportion excludes the mature students colleges (Hughes Hall, Lucy Cavendish, St Edmund's and Wolfson)

⁶ Excludes Harris Manchester which admits mature students only

⁷ [Undergraduate admissions statistics](#), University of Oxford

State grammars and comprehensive schools

Box 1: Comprehensive schools and school sixth forms

The admission policy of state schools (grammar or comprehensive) reflects how they admit pupils at the start of secondary education. Admissions to sixth form at 'comprehensive' schools can involve some selection by ability, for instance a minimum number of GCSE passes at certain grades. Some comprehensive schools describe their sixth forms as 'selective'.

Oxford does not identify all grammar schools in its admissions data. Most grammar schools are academies. Oxford's [school type](#) data does not break down academies into grammars and comprehensives.

In 2020 657 of the 2,137 home students accepted to Cambridge from the state sector were from grammar schools compared with 1,093 from comprehensives. The success rate for applications from grammar schools was 29% compared to 22% at state comprehensives.

For context in January 2020 11.9% of Key Stage 5 pupils (age 16-18) at schools in England were in grammar schools.⁸

Further education sector colleges

Both Oxford and Cambridge publish data on the applications and acceptances from students at sixth form colleges and other further education (FE) institutions.

In 2020 418 home students were accepted to Oxford from sixth form colleges. The success rate for applications was 22%. 66 were accepted from other FE institutions where the success rate was lower at 16%.⁹ In 2020 288 home students were accepted to Cambridge from sixth form colleges. Their acceptance rate was 22%. 99 were accepted from other FE institutions where the acceptance rate was also lower at 18%.¹⁰

1.2 Targets in Access Agreements and Access and Participation Plans

Pre-2012

When 'variable' fees for new students were introduced in 2006 both universities set 'targets' for the proportion of pupils they aimed to take from state schools by 2011. These were set out in their Access Agreements with regulator at the time, the Office of Fair Access (Ofa). Target rates were based on home applicants/entrants only so are slightly different from the other figures in this note which look at all those attending UK schools and colleges. Oxford's target was 62% of *applicants*¹¹ and Cambridge's was 60-63% of *entrants*.¹² In 2011 64% of UK applicants to Oxford were from state schools, this fell to 63% in

⁸ [Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020](#), DfE

⁹ [Undergraduate admissions statistics](#), University of Oxford

¹⁰ [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - 2020 cycle](#), University of Cambridge

¹¹ In 2009 just under 60% of applicants to Oxford were from the maintained sector. The target level was suggested as it was the proportion of candidates with three As at A levels from maintained schools.

¹² www.offa.org.uk

2012 and in 2013.¹³ In 2011 57% of UK acceptances at Cambridge were from the state sector.¹⁴ This increased to 63% in 2012 and fell slightly to 61% in 2013 (excludes home students at overseas and other schools/colleges).¹⁵

2012-2018

All universities which planned to charge tuition fees of over £6,000 for new students from 2012 had to produce revised Access Agreements. Those for [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#) are published on the (archived) Offa website. They include a range of targets and milestones the institutions set themselves and agreed with Offa. Oxford's do not include a simple state school percentage target, data on its progress can be found [here](#). One of Cambridge's targets was to increase the proportion of UK state sector entrants to 62-63% by the end of the access agreement period (2016). Its rate was above 62% (home students only) in each year from 2014 to 2016.¹⁶

Cambridge also publishes [research into admissions and evaluation of widening participation](#). This includes their own research into the issue and lists publications by other organisations.

2019 onwards

Access and Participation Plans agreed with the new Office for Students (OfS) came into force from 2019/20. These, and the earlier agreements with Offa, can be found on the OfS website for both [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#). These contain an assessment of performance on access, continuation, attainment and progression across a range of different student groups linked in one way or another to widening participation to disadvantaged groups. Much of the underlying data is taken from the [OfS access and participation dashboard](#). They also include a description on the measures the university is undertaking to improve performance on these measures, including how much they plan to spend and the targets they have agreed.

The first agreement covered 2019/20 only. Cambridge's targets included one to increase the proportion of state schools admissions to 63.4% in 2018/19 and 64.0% in 2019/20. Oxford's did not include a target on state school intake.

The second agreement covers 2020/21 to 2024/25. Cambridge's agreement extends its state-sector target to 69.1% in 2024/25. Oxford's targets do not include any on state school pupils.

1.3 Historical information

The Education Act 1944 extended free education to all state secondary schools and introduced a clear distinction between primary and

¹³ [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - Applications by College](#), University of Oxford

¹⁴ This is calculated on a slightly different basis from the Offa target data which is year of entry not application/acceptance.

¹⁵ [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - 2011 cycle](#), University of Cambridge; [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - 2012 cycle](#), University of Cambridge

¹⁶ [Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access \(OFFA\) 2018-19](#), University of Cambridge

secondary education at age 11. There was some public sector support for some pupils in grammar schools before then and pupils did stay on to the senior department of elementary school. But without an entirely free maintained secondary school sector the concept of entrance data by type of school is meaningless.

The rest of this section summarises historical information on types of entrants. It uses different definitions and is taken from different sources so is presented in a narrative form with the appropriate context and definitions, rather than a simple table or chart which would leave these out and present a misleading picture.

The issue of differences in access to Oxford and Cambridge is very longstanding. The 1922 Royal Commission quoted work which stated that after the Reformation the flow of monks and friars to the two universities ceased and "...as a direct result of this, the proportion of country gentlemen's sons increased".¹⁷ The report of the 1922 Royal Commission looked into the accessibility of these universities to 'poor' students. While not defining what it meant by 'poor', the report stated that reforms which followed the 1852 Royal Commission meant that:¹⁸

The number of poor men in residence at both Universities increased materially during the last half of the nineteenth century. This increase has been very rapid in recent years...

Citing evidence from the two years before the First World War the report said that around half of Scholarships awarded were to boys from 'cheaper' boarding and day schools and around 20% were won by boys from the 'cheapest' day schools.¹⁹ It added that "practically all the boys on the latter list must have been sons of poorer parents".²⁰

The first regular statistics on school leavers going on to university by type of school were published in the Board of Education annual statistics on public education from the late 1920s. These show that school leavers from England and Wales in 1927-28 who had earlier been in public elementary schools made up 22% of entrants to Cambridge in 1928-29 and 21% of entrants to Oxford. Rates at most other universities other than London were around 50% and the equivalent rate for all universities was 37%. Over the next few years these rates increased slightly and reached 23% and 24% at Cambridge and Oxford respectively among leavers in 1932-33.²¹

The University Grants Committee began to publish data on the school background of entrants in the late 1930s. Their 1937-38 report stated:²²

In the course of last year attention in Parliament and elsewhere was directed to the question of the number of students

¹⁷ J A Venn *Oxford and Cambridge Matriculations*, quoted in *Report of the Royal Commission (Oxford and Cambridge Universities)* Cm 1588 (1922) p.10

¹⁸ Cm 1588 para. 155

¹⁹ Those with fees of less than £10 per year, around £800 in current prices.

²⁰ Cm 1588 para. 155

²¹ *Education in 1933. Being the report of the Board of Education and the statistics of public education for England and Wales*, Board of Education, Cm 4631 (1934) Table 45 (and earlier editions)

²² *Returns from universities and university colleges in receipt of Treasury grant academic year 1937-38*, University Grants Committee

originating from public elementary schools who found their way to universities.

Some information had earlier been provided by all universities, other than Oxford and Cambridge, and figures were published in this year for the first time. Oxford and Cambridge were included from 1938-39 when 24.2% of full-time home entrants to Oxford and 19.3% at Cambridge started their education in a public sector elementary school. The equivalent figure for all other universities was 54.8%.²³ Such students could have attended independent schools afterwards, or been supported by central or local government at a grammar school. In 1947-48 the rates had reached 39% for Oxford and 30% for Cambridge. In the final year these data were published (1950-51) 43% of entrants to Oxford and 34% of entrants to Cambridge came started their education at public sector elementary schools. The rate for the other universities had increased to 71%.²⁴

This statistic became less relevant as more pupils benefited from free state secondary education and could potentially attend state grammar schools. No routinely published data on entrants by type of secondary school replaced it for a period of around two decades. There were some one-off assessments in the intervening period.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the UK carried out a detailed inquiry into university applications that was published in 1957.²⁵ This found a very similar proportion of entrants who started at state elementary schools as the 1950-51 figure mentioned above. Among candidates admitted to Cambridge in 1955-56 27% were from state grammar schools (or equivalent in Scotland and Northern Ireland). The equivalent figure for Oxford was 39%. This compares to 60% across all universities. State grammar schools would have been the only type of maintained school to send pupils to university at the time.²⁶ These figures and all those below exclude entrants from Direct Grant grammar schools (they received public funding to pay the fees of pupils from state primary schools that had to make up at least 25% of their places).

A survey carried out in 1961 as part of the work for the Robbins Report found that 34% of all students at Oxford and 27% at Cambridge had attended a state secondary school compared to 63% across all universities. Entrants to men's colleges in 1964 were also reported with 37% from state schools at Oxford and 37% at Cambridge. Breaking the survey results down by entrance year the authors reported that the

At the end of the 1920s around 20% of entrants to Oxford and Cambridge started their education at a state school. In the late 1930s these rates were little different. By the early 1950s they rates had increased to 43% and 34% at Oxford and Cambridge respectively.

In the early 1960s 34% of students at Oxford and 27% at Cambridge came from state secondary schools

²³ *Returns from universities and university colleges in receipt of Treasury grant academic year 1938-39*, University Grants Committee. Table 2

²⁴ *Returns from universities and university colleges in receipt of Treasury grant academic year 1950-51*, University Grants Committee. Table 2

²⁵ R Kelsall *Applications for Admissions to Universities. Report on an Inquiry commissions by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (1957)*. Tables 9 and 11

²⁶ Excludes those who had been to such schools *and* a private or preparatory school

proportion of state school pupils entering either institution went from 26% in 1959 to 37% in 1964.²⁷

The Franks Commission of Inquiry (1966) looked at a very wide range of different aspects the organisation and administration of the University of Oxford. It reported that the proportion of men starting first degree courses who were from maintained schools was 19.2% in 1938-39 and increased to 30.1% in 1958-59 and 40.2% in 1965-66. 32.6% of women starting in 1938-39 were from maintained schools and this increased to 36.6% in 1958-59 and 42.7% in 1965-66.²⁸

If these findings are put alongside the data in the table at the end of this paper and the earlier chart we can conclude that 'state school pupils' improved their representation at Oxford and Cambridge between the end of the 1930s and end of the 1940s; there appears to have been relatively little change in the late 1950s, but further increases in the 1960s and late 1970s which saw state school pupil numbers draw roughly equal with independent schools at the start of the 1980s. State school participation was higher at Oxford, on the measures given here, up to the mid-1960s. However, given there are large gaps this may not necessarily have been the case in each and every year.

1.4 Individual schools and colleges

Sutton Trust analysis of entries from 2002 to 2009

The Sutton Trust analysed entrants to Oxbridge by individual school over the period 2002-06.²⁹ They found that the 30 schools³⁰ (less than one percent of the total) with the highest admissions rates to Oxbridge made up 15% of entrants. The admission or 'hit rate' used by the authors is the number of entrants to Oxbridge as a proportion of the total number of university entrants. The 200 schools with the highest Oxbridge hit rates (just over 5% of relevant schools) accounted for 48% of entrants. An average of 10% of university entrants from such schools went to Oxbridge, compared to 1% at the remaining schools. Similar but less extreme patterns were found for entry to the 'Sutton Trust' group of universities³¹.

Analysis of this data and A-level results³² found that variation in results could only 'explain' part of the divergent entry rates across schools. Some schools with very similar results had very different entry rates. The top 30 performing state grammar schools had similar A-level scores to the top 30 independent schools and, based on results alone, expected Oxbridge hit rates would be higher in independent schools by less than

²⁷ *Higher Education* (the Robbins Report) -Report of the committee appointed to the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63. Cm 2154. Appendix Two (B) Table 11 and Annex D

²⁸ *Report of Commission of Enquiry* (Franks Commission Report), University of Oxford. Vol II (1966). Tables 31 and 32.

²⁹ [University admissions by individual schools](#), The Sutton Trust (September 2007)

³⁰ 28 independent, one grammar and one comprehensive

³¹ The 13 with the highest public league table rankings: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, London School of Economics, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, University College London, Warwick and York.

³² Average A level points score per pupil.

half of one percentage point. The actual rate for these independent schools was 13.2% in 2006, well above the 7.5% for the top 30 grammars. Different indicators of A level performance might produce somewhat different outcomes, but the report noted a slightly larger gap when hit rates were compared to average A level points per exam entry.³³

Westminster School and St Paul's Girls' School achieved the highest Oxbridge hit rates over the five years with 49.9% and 49.0% (of pupils who went on to university) respectively. The best performing state grammar and comprehensive schools on this measure were the Colchester Royal Grammar School (19.5%) and the Dame Alice Owen's School (10.5%). There was only one state comprehensive in the top 100 list which excludes schools where fewer than 20 pupils went to Oxbridge over the five year period.

The Sutton Trust updated this research in 2011 with data on entrants between 2007 and 2009.³⁴ This found a similar pattern to the earlier report. Students from the 100 schools with the highest Oxbridge admission rates³⁵ took more than 30% of places. There were 16 state grammars among these schools, but no state comprehensives. Hills Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge had 204 students accepted at Oxbridge over these three years, only Eton and Westminster had higher totals, but this was 8.6% of all their students who applied to university and was outside the top 100 on this admission rate.

In 2011 students from grammar schools made up around one-third of state school entrants to Oxford and Cambridge respectively.³⁶ In the same year they made up 26% of students who gained at least three As at A-Level from the state sector³⁷ in England.³⁸

Data on entry up to 2019

Both [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#) publish data on applications and acceptances by school/college (UCAS apply centre). These include applications from overseas and look at applications, offers and acceptances. In both cases any number below three is withheld to maintain data privacy. This means they do not distinguish between schools/colleges with no acceptances (or applications or offers) and those with just one or two.

The analysis below looks at those schools and colleges which send the most students to Oxford or Cambridge and patterns among these institutions by type of school/college. It also looks at the overall distribution regardless of school/college type to answer questions such as what proportion of entries do the top schools and colleges (on this

³³ Sutton Trust 2007 pp15-17

³⁴ [Degrees of Success. University Chances by Individual School](#), Sutton Trust (July 2011)

³⁵ Here as a proportion of UCAS applicants from each school

³⁶ *Undergraduate Admissions Statistics: 2011 cycle*, University of Cambridge. Undergraduate Admissions Statistics: 2011 entry *University of Oxford*

³⁷ State funded schools and FE sector colleges

³⁸ *GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2010/11 (Revised)*, DfE

measure) account for, and how many schools or colleges have few if any applications to Oxbridge?

Readers should note the caveat about the definition of comprehensive schools and sixth forms in [Box 1](#) above.

Cambridge 2019

Cambridge publishes its data on individual schools and colleges for single years. The latest data is for 2020.³⁹ The analysis in this paper is for 2019. The top two institutions by number of acceptances were Hills Road Sixth form College in Cambridge with 42 and the independent Westminster School with 39. Sixth form colleges typically have large cohorts and many send relatively large numbers of pupils to Oxford and Cambridge. Three of the five institutions sending the most students to Cambridge were sixth form colleges. The top 50 institutions by absolute number of acceptances consisted of:

- 20 UK independent schools
- 5 overseas institutions
- 6 Sixth form colleges
- 18 grammar schools, partially selective schools or comprehensive schools with explicitly selective sixth forms
- 1 comprehensive school

The 10 UK schools and colleges with the highest number of acceptances made up 10% of entrants from the UK in 2019. The top 50 made up 30%. The top 140 schools and colleges (6% of UCAS apply centres) made up half of all acceptances.

The majority of schools/colleges with the highest acceptance rates⁴⁰ were maintained schools. Excluding those with fewer than 10 applications, 15 of the top 20 were maintained, mostly grammars.

1,904 of the 2,175 UK apply centres (86%) had fewer than three applications to Cambridge in 2019.

Oxford 2017-2019

Oxford publishes the same data, but also aggregates annual figures over three-year periods. The latest data are for 2018-20.⁴¹ The analysis in this paper is for the three years 2017-2019. The aggregated figures mean that there are fewer schools and colleges where data are withheld due to the small number of applications. It also means that year-on-year variations, which typical at most schools given the small numbers involved, are reduced.

In 2019 students from 10 schools and colleges made up 10% of all UK entrants to Cambridge. At around 1,900 school and colleges fewer than three students applied to Cambridge

³⁹ [Applications, Offers & Acceptances by UCAS Apply Centre 2020](#), University of Cambridge

⁴⁰ Acceptances as a proportion of applications.

⁴¹ [UCAS apply centres of applicants](#), University of Oxford

Across the years 2017-19 the top four institutions by total number of students accepted were all independent schools -Westminster School (133), Eton (124), St Paul's School (99) and King's College School (84). Independent schools dominated the top 50 institutions by number of acceptances which consisted of:

- 32 UK independent schools
- 3 overseas institutions
- 6 Sixth form colleges
- 9 grammar schools, or selective sixth forms
- 0 comprehensive schools

The highest ranked 'comprehensive' school on this list was The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial RC School (52nd with 25 acceptances).

The 10 UK schools and colleges with the highest number of acceptances made up 11% of entrants from the UK in 2017-19. The top 50 made up 28%. The top 159 schools and colleges (5% of UCAS apply centres) made up half of all acceptances over this period.

Unlike Cambridge the majority of schools/colleges with the highest acceptance rates⁴² were independent schools. Excluding those with fewer than 30 applications, 14 of the top 20 were independent schools. Although five of the top seven were state schools, again mostly grammar schools.

1,945 of the 2,897 UK apply centres included over these three years (67%) had fewer than three applications to Oxford in 2017-19.

Individual state schools and colleges in England

The Department for Education publishes data on the destinations of level 3 (A level and equivalent) students at following their 16-18 study at state schools and colleges in England. The latest figures include those who finished their 16-18 study in 2016/17 and looks at their destination over the following two years.⁴³ As well as an overall higher education destination the data include those going to Oxbridge. The analysis looks at the entire cohort at each institution and includes the percentage going to Oxbridge, not just the absolute number. Unlike the earlier data from Oxford and Cambridge It identifies schools and colleges with no students going to either university. The latest data show:⁴⁴

- 2,812 students went to Oxbridge out of a cohort of around 364,000. A rate of just under 0.8%.
- 840 different schools or colleges (out of 2,354) sent one or more student to Oxbridge
- 1,491 sent no students to Oxbridge⁴⁵

Between 2017 and 2019 students from 10 schools and colleges made up 11% of all UK entrants to Oxford. Fewer than three students applied to Oxford at around 1,950 school and colleges

More than 60% of state schools sixth forms and colleges in England sent no students to either Oxbridge or Cambridge from their 2017 cohort

⁴² Acceptances as a proportion of applications.

⁴³ These are 'sustained' destinations only which is defined as a continuous sixth month period.

⁴⁴ [Progression to higher education or training 2018/19](#), DfE

⁴⁵ A further 23 had five or fewer students in their cohort and hence details of their destinations are suppressed.

- 3.9% of pupils from grammar schools went to Oxbridge compared with 0.8% at comprehensive schools and 0.3% at sixth form colleges/centres and other 16-19 institutions
- The top 25 institutions by the absolute number of students going to Oxbridge were all either selective schools⁴⁶ or sixth form colleges. Taken together they made up 21% of entrants from the state sector in England. Hills Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge sent the most with 58.
- 15 state grammar or partially selective schools sent more than 10% of their students to Oxbridge. The King's College London Maths School (a 16-19 Free School and not formally a grammar) had the highest rate at 25%

These findings are for one year only. Given the small absolute numbers involved at most schools and colleges you would expect year-on-year variation at individual institutions. The general pattern of entry and how it varies is not subject to this variability.

There were no comprehensive schools among the 25 state schools and colleges which sent the most students to Oxbridge from their 2017 cohort

2. Other indicators of equality and widening participation

There are many different ways of looking at access to Oxbridge by different groups of students that have been/are subject to educational, economic and social disadvantage. This paper only looks at a small number of the longer established indicators. For information on a much wider range, and indicators of how different groups of students succeed at university and how well they do afterward, readers should look at:

- The relevant sections from the latest statistical reports on admissions from [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#)
- The OfS [Access and participation data dashboard](#)
- The latest Access and Participation Plans for [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#).
- [Research papers](#) published by Cambridge which were used to develop its latest Access and Participation Plan

2.1 Gender

The following table shows the proportion of female students attending Oxbridge at selected dates over the last 30 years. There has been a substantial increase over this period. Latest data show that Oxford has around 52% female representation and Cambridge slightly below 48%⁴⁷. Differences between the two institutions may in part reflect differences in the range of courses offered. Rates were below 20% in

In the mid-1950s only around 10% of students at Cambridge and 15% at Oxford were women. The latest data show that Oxford has just under 50% female representation and Cambridge slightly below 48%.

⁴⁶ Includes Dame Alice Owen's School which is described as partially selective.

⁴⁷ From 2009/10 the rate at Cambridge fell below 50% in the HESA figures. Their data included many fewer part-time students from that year and a larger majority of part-time undergraduates are female.

1970/71. Women accounted for 56.5% of all undergraduates across all UK institutions in 2019/20.⁴⁸

Female undergraduates at Oxbridge						
Academic year, home and overseas students						
	1970/71 ^(a)	1980/81 ^(a)	1990/91	2001/02	2010/11	2019/20
Oxford	19.4%	29.8%	43.2%	51.0%	50.4%	52.2%
Cambridge	12.9%	27.5%	40.0%	53.6%	47.2%	48.1%

(a) Full-time degree students only
 Note. The treatment of part-time students from 2009/10 means the data from before and after this time are not comparable.

Sources: *University statistics, UGC, various years*
Students in Higher Education Institutions, HESA, various years. Tables 12 and 9a
Higher Education Student Data, HESA

In 1938/39 women made up 8.7% of all home full-time entrants to Cambridge compared to 17.5% at Oxford and 27.6% across all universities in Great Britain. By 1955/56 this rate was little different. It had reached 9.7% at Cambridge, fallen to 15.4% at Oxford and was 28.8% for all universities in Great Britain.⁴⁹

2.2 Ethnicity

Information on the ethnic background of home students applying and accepted to Oxford and Cambridge has been produced since the early 1990s. In 1992, 5% of accepted UK applicants to Oxford were non-white⁵⁰. This increased to almost 8% in 2002 and 22% in 2019.⁵¹ At Cambridge approximately 5% of acceptances in 1990 were non-white, increasing to 14% in 2002 and to 28% in 2019.⁵² The equivalent figure for 2019 from all home accepted applicants through UCAS was 30%.⁵³ Admission rates by ethnic group will be influenced to a large extent by underlying patterns of attainment.

The following chart shows UCAS data on trends in the proportion of minority ethnic entrants.

⁴⁸ [HE student data \(Who's studying in HE\)](#), HESA

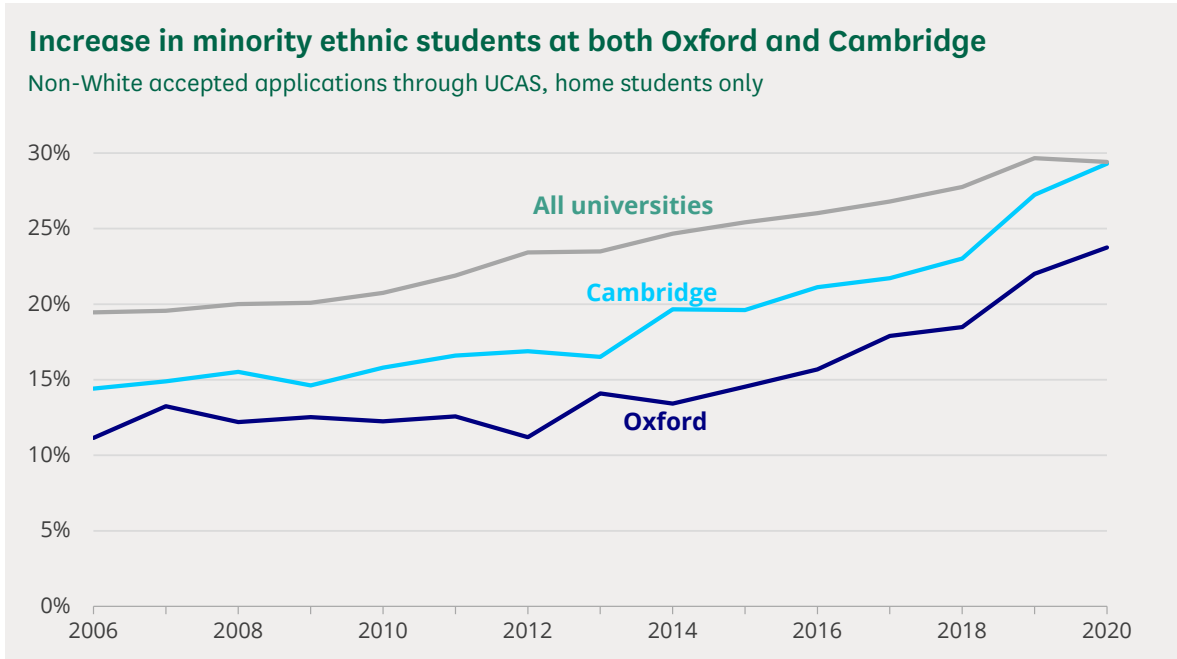
⁴⁹ *Returns from universities and university colleges in receipt of Treasury grant*, various years, University Grants Committee. Table 2

⁵⁰ Home accepted applicants only. Includes those of mixed background

⁵¹ [Undergraduate admissions statistics](#), University of Oxford, various years.

⁵² Latest figures exclude 'unknowns'. *Undergraduates: statistics of applications and acceptances*, various years, Cambridge University Reporter; [Undergraduate Admissions Statistics - 2019 cycle](#), University of Cambridge

⁵³ [UCAS end of cycle data resources 2019](#)



Source: [2020 entry provider-level end of cycle data resources](#), UCAS

2.3 'Under-represented groups'

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) publishes data on the participation of two different under-represented groups. The latest results for Oxford and Cambridge are shown in the following table. Benchmark figures have been calculated to help compare institutions. These estimate the score that the whole UK sector would have achieved if it had the same subject and entry qualification profile as the institution. These are also adjusted for the location of the institution. Results that are significantly different from the benchmark are marked (*) in the table.

Access to Oxbridge by under-represented groups				
Young full-time first degree entrants 2019/20				
	From state schools or colleges		From low participation neighbourhoods	
	%	Benchmark	%	Benchmark
University of Cambridge	69.1	74.2 *	4.7	5.5
University of Oxford	62.2	73.5 *	4.2	5.6
All UK institutions	90.1	..	11.8	..

* Denotes a value significantly different from both the unadjusted and the location adjusted benchmark

Source: [Widening participation: UK Performance Indicators 2019/20](#), HESA

As in previous years both institutions had significantly fewer pupils from the state sector than their benchmark values. They both also had fewer, but not significantly fewer, pupils from low participation

neighbourhoods than the benchmark.⁵⁴ These indicators have been published since 1997/98 and both universities have been significantly below their state school in each year. Earlier data also included social class information and both institutions were also below their benchmarks on this indicator. They have also taken a smaller proportion of pupils from low participation neighbourhoods, but this difference has not always been significant and has not been so at either institution since 2007/08.⁵⁵

Oxford and Cambridge were not alone in scoring below the benchmark values for state school and lower socio-economic group participation. In 2019/20, 25 out of 147 higher education institutions in England were significantly below their (location adjusted) state school benchmark and 13 were significantly below their (location adjusted) low participation neighbourhood benchmark.⁵⁶

2.4 Students eligible for maintenance grants

In 2015-16 14.5% of post-2012 full-time undergraduates at Oxford and 13.4% at Cambridge received full state support⁵⁷. To be eligible their household income would have had to be below £25,000 per year. The average across all institutions in England was 25%. A further 8.0% at Oxford and 7.9% at Cambridge received either partial state support or were in other under-represented groups within OFFA's remit (6% nationally).⁵⁸

Maintenance grants were abolished for new students from 2016.

⁵⁴ Low participation neighbourhoods are those wards in the bottom 20% for young participation in higher education. This is based on the proportion of people who were aged 18 between 2009 and 2013 and entered higher education between 2009/10 and 2014/14 aged 18 or 19.

⁵⁵ *Performance indicators in higher education*, HESA/HEFCE

⁵⁶ [Widening participation: UK Performance Indicators 2019/20](#), HESA

⁵⁷ A full maintenance grant

⁵⁸ [Monitoring of 2015-16 access agreements](#), OFFA

Acceptances to Oxbridge by type of school

All domiciles, by year of entry

	Oxford				Cambridge			
	Maintained		Independent	Overseas and others	Maintained		Independent	Overseas and others
	number	% ^a			number	% ^a		
1989	1,457	49.9%	1,463	244	1,404	52.2%	1,285	324
1990	1,384	48.1%	1,493	233	1,385	50.1%	1,379	353
1991	1,343	46.6%	1,537	309	1,436	50.4%	1,415	165
1992	1,362	46.8%	1,549	273	1,412	51.5%	1,332	308
1993	1,380	48.3%	1,479	307	1,393	50.1%	1,389	286
1994	1,410	48.1%	1,519	347	1,413	50.0%	1,415	267
1995	1,390	48.1%	1,500	341	1,413	50.1%	1,409	293
1996	1,480	47.9%	1,612	305	1,374	52.0%	1,269	225
1997	1,338	45.8%	1,581	300	1,453	51.0%	1,397	274
1998	1,449	48.1%	1,565	294	1,414	50.4%	1,390	300
1999	1,445	48.5%	1,535	259	1,461	52.5%	1,320	303
2000	1,519	51.9%	1,410	292	1,458	52.2%	1,336	341
2001	1,575	53.2%	1,388	302	1,531	53.2%	1,349	368
2002	1,671	54.3%	1,406	316	1,672	55.5%	1,340	392
2003	1,539	51.7%	1,440	301	1,643	54.7%	1,360	432
2004	1,518	52.7%	1,362	296	1,588	55.6%	1,268	437
2005	1,490	51.4%	1,410	314	1,630	55.9%	1,287	467
2006	1,511	52.1%	1,391	306	1,554	53.7%	1,340	445
2007	1,484	51.4%	1,402	275	1,517	53.3%	1,327	546
2008	1,534	53.6%	1,328	308	1,762	58.0%	1,277	492
2009	1,482	52.3%	1,349	371	1,675	56.0%	1,318	486
2010	1,475	53.6%	1,277	402	1,609	56.1%	1,259	526
2011	1,516	56.1%	1,188	482	1,500	55.7%	1,194	580
2012	1,519	55.6%	1,211	503	1,687	59.5%	1,149	601
2013	1,469	55.0%	1,204	528	1,590	57.8%	1,161	620
2014	1,435	54.6%	1,194	532	1,626	58.7%	1,143	679
2015	1,411	53.8%	1,213	592	1,621	58.8%	1,137	691
2016	1,490	56.0%	1,169	603	1,603	58.6%	1,131	723
2017	1,439	56.1%	1,127	704	1,642	60.5%	1,070	785
2018	1,509	58.6%	1,068	733	1,637	61.3%	1,033	795
2019	1,562	60.9%	1,003	721	1,779	65.5%	938	811
2020	1,952	66.9%	967	776	2,140	67.8%	1,017	840

(a) Maintained school pupils as a percentage of all accepted maintained and independent school pupils

Sources: Undergraduate admission statistics, University of Oxford, Oxford colleges: statistics for entry, various years
Undergraduates: statistics of applications and acceptances, various, Cambridge University Reporter
Undergraduate Admissions Statistics, various years, University of Cambridge

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