

# Oxford Brookes' performance against widening participation milestones

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December 2015

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## 1.0 Introduction

### Who are the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) and what is an Access Agreement?

The Office of Fair Access (OFFA) is an independent public body whose role is to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for under-represented groups.

All Universities in England charging a tuition fee above the basic level are required to submit an access agreement to OFFA. This agreement sets out how the institution will support recruitment and student success of under-represented groups and will include details of financial support packages, outreach activities and milestones for widening participation.

The access agreement is renewed every year and approved by OFFA. Part of the process involves monitoring progress in meeting access agreement commitments and targets.

### What are the University's widening access milestones?

In Oxford Brookes' access agreement, the University has committed to examining the recruitment patterns and academic performance of 6 under-represented groups:

- Disabled Students
- Students from low social-economic groups (HESA SEC's 4,5,6 and 7)
- Students from black and minority ethnic groups (BME)
- Mature students without a first degree
- Students from low income households ( $\leq$  27k).
- Students whose parent/guardian has no HE background
- Students from low participation areas – POLAR 3 (Young participation rate for students from Quintiles 1 and 2)

The milestones cover student performance across the full student lifecycle; described as 'getting in, getting through and moving on and involving the following stages:

- Applicants
- Entrants
- First year retention
- Completion: Completed course successfully and/or gained any other award
- Good Completion: Proportion achieving a first or upper-second class honours degree
- Employment (including Further Study)

## How do we measure performance?

The performance of the above student groups is analysed for each stage of the student lifecycle outlined above and against the OFFA targets for 2014/15. These targets have been devised by the University. Performance relative to the University average<sup>1</sup> is also considered though the emphasis of this particular report is on the interpretation of performance statistics in the context of national statistical data and sector average benchmarks.

The data has been extracted from the Academic Performance Tracking Tool (APTT). The report takes a University level view with a Faculty perspective provided as part of the Strategic Planning process. A year on year view of performance is given in order to analyse trends over time.

## Data considerations/changes since last report

We keep our OFFA targets under constant review and any changes or developments are brought to the attention of and considered by the Widening Participation Advisory group (WPAG).

The Strategic and Business Planning Office (SBPO) have re-defined the good completion indicator in order to align it with how HESA present achievement data for the sector (namely using the student actual leaving year rather than expected leaving year). The related OFFA targets may need to be revised to reflect a new base line.

The completion indicator is based on a students expected cohort end year. Some students will complete on time whilst others will take longer especially those who have transferred to another course within Brookes. For these students the cohort end year on eCSIS will not be altered to reflect a later date. For this reason, the completion data (which currently excludes the still studying and internal transfers) needs to be treated with caution.

## Guide to interpreting the tables

The following information needs to be used by the reader to interpret the tables in each section; it provides details of the 'current' year each measure is based on.

- Applicants – 2015/16 entry year
- Entrants – 2015/16 entry year (with the exception of low income students where the current year is 2013/14 entry due to data restrictions)
- Retention – 2014/15 entry year
- Completion – 2014/15 cohort end year
- Good Completion – 2014/15 leaving year
- Employment – 2013/14 leaving year

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<sup>1</sup> All Undergraduates and select PGT students (on courses charging maximum fee level) that are UK domiciled, paying the domestic fee, studying full-time or sandwich out at Oxford Brookes University or Franchise Colleges.

## 2.0 Performance against widening participation milestones

### 2.1 Disabled students

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		Disabled Students				
	Sector	University	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	9.3%	-	<b>12.0%</b> <b>(2714)</b>	11.3% (2578)	11.4% (2738)	10.3% (2454)	10.2% (2609)
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	11.0%	-	<b>15.1%</b> <b>(614)</b>	16.5% (574)	17.6% (676)	16.1% (504)	17.1% (620)
<b>Retention</b>	91.7% <sup>2</sup>	92.3%	<b>92.3%</b>	91.3%	92.5%	92.4%	92.0%
<b>Completion</b>		83.0%	<b>80.2%</b>	84.6%	83.0%	84.3%	84.2%
<i><b>% Still studying or transferred</b></i>	-	<i>6.2%</i>	<i>7.3%</i>	<i>4.3%</i>	<i>4.7%</i>	<i>3.1%</i>	<i>3.0%</i>
<b>Good Completion</b>	69.0%	80.2%	<b>77.1%</b>	73.9%	69.3%	72.8%	73.7%
<b>Employment</b>	86.9%	88.3%	<b>85.0%</b>	85.8%	84.8%	84.3%	83.4%

Observations:

- There has been an increase in disabled applicants in terms of absolute numbers and proportional representation compared to last year– with those declaring a Specific Learning Difficulty constituting the largest proportion of disabled applicants. Applicants with mental health issues (+37%) showed marked growth compared to the previous year.
- **Disabled entrants have also seen an increase in absolute numbers (+40)**; however due to a larger increase in overall entrant population, the proportional representation shows a decline of -1.4%.
- The retention rate is higher than the sector average and at par with the University average.
- Completion rate, however, is -2.8% lower than the University, with a higher proportion of students, originally scheduled to complete in 2014, still studying. The long term trend is for students with disabilities to take longer to complete their courses.
- Although good completion is below the University average, it is +8.1% above the sector average<sup>3</sup>.
- Employment rate is below University and sector averages,

<sup>2</sup> Equality Challenge Unit – Higher Education Statistical Report, 2015

<sup>3</sup> HEFCE – Differences in Degree Outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics-Sept 2015

- The sector shows a 4% gap in the degree attainment rates of disabled and non-disabled students; interestingly employment rates (6 months after graduating) show an equivalent gap. Brookes shows similar gap in good completion and employment rates of disabled (-4%) and non-disabled students.

A HEFCE report<sup>4</sup> on differential outcomes by demographic criteria shows that the gap in employment rates diminished when a similar survey targeted the same respondents 40 months after graduation. This would suggest that disabled students take longer to get into employment after graduating. **The report also says that in future, it might be possible to link up student performance data with employment records which would allow an evidence based analysis of graduate outcomes.**

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<sup>4</sup> HEFCE - Differences in Employment Outcomes – Sept 2015.

## 2.2 Students from low socio-economic groups

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		Low SE Students				
	Sector	University	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	-	-	<b>21.4%</b> <b>(6165)</b>	20.9% (5893)	20.2% (5669)	19.7% (5797)	20.0% (4930)
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	33.4% <sup>5</sup>	-	<b>32.3%</b> (1316)	39.6% (1380)	40.7% (1568)	41.3% (1292)	39.2% (1423)
<b>Retention</b>	-	92.3%	<b>92.5%</b>	92.2%	92.2%	93.1%	91.7%
<b>Completion</b>	-	83.0%	<b>83.4%</b>	86.5%	84.7%	82.6%	84.5%
<b>% Still studying or transferred</b>	-	6.2%	<b>6.3%</b>	3.9%	4.5%	3.6%	3.3%
<b>Good Completion</b>	-	80.2%	<b>81.5%</b>	74.9%	73.1%	73.9%	72.7%
<b>Employment</b>	-	88.3%	<b>88.5%</b>	90.5%	86.9%	87.5%	87.8%

*N.B. Latest year for applicants = 2014/15; data source UCAS (EXACT)*

Observations:

- **On this particular OFFA metric it is useful to note that HEFCE started an in-depth review process of the UK Performance Indicators relating to widening the higher education participation in 2013. As a consequence of this review the Steering Group undertaking the review has confirmed the discontinuation indicators based on the National Statistics Social Economic Classifications (NSEC) It was pointed out that NS-SEC was 'a self-reported measure and thus open to misreporting, prone to inaccurate coding and has a relatively high volume of missing data' i.e. Unknowns. Hence this PI must be treated with caution.**
- Applicants from this OFFA group are the highest proportion and absolute numbers since 2011/12. Despite this our entrant proportion is the lowest recorded over the same period. A closer investigation showed that in the last 3 years applicants from lower SE backgrounds have consistently recorded lower offer rates, with a margin of difference equating to at least - 11% ,compared to applicants from higher SE classes.
- The rise in tuition fees may also have affected entrant numbers. The closest sector benchmark in this category is for young, full time UG entrants<sup>4</sup>; and the latest year for Brookes shows only marginal difference with the said sector average (by -1.1%).
- **Performance is above University average across all indicators studied in the above table, particularly for retention and good completion.**

<sup>5</sup> HESA – Widening Participation of underrepresented groups (table T1b)

## 2.3 Students from ethnic minority groups

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		BMEG Students				
	Sector	University	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	24.1% <sup>6</sup>	-	<b>18.1%</b> <b>(5100)</b>	17.3% (4766)	17.7% (4867)	16.0% (4662)	15.7% (3829)
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	23.0%	-	<b>16.9% (687)</b>	17.0% (592)	16.4% (632)	16.8% (526)	13.5% (491)
<b>Retention</b>	91.5% <sup>2</sup>	92.3%	<b>92.7%</b>	88.7%	88.6%	91.8%	91.2%
<b>Completion</b> <i>% Still studying or transferred</i>	-	83.0%	<b>72.7%</b>	80.7%	82.2%	78.5%	79.0%
		6.2%	<b>11.2%</b>	3.1%	3.9%	2.5%	3.0%
<b>Good Completion</b>	60.0%	80.2%	<b>70.4%</b>	60.8%	60.9%	60.7%	57.8%
<b>Employment</b>	83.7%	88.3%	<b>84.1%</b>	84.7%	75.9%	83.3%	80.3%

*N.B. Latest year for applicants = 2014/15; data source UCAS (EXACT)*

Observations:

- The proportion of applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased by 0.8% in the most recent year studied above (equating to 334 more applicants in absolute numbers) In the 5 years studied above, there has been a 33% increase in applicants - the sector has recorded growth of 9.8% in the same period . **However, the sector average is above Brookes' BME participation rate by +6%.**
- Although BME entrants have increased in absolute numbers, the proportion in the student body has declined owing to a corresponding increase in overall entrants. **Once again, the sector average is higher by +6.1%.**  
*The increase in absolute numbers may be attributed mainly to an increase in On Campus BME students, up by 17.5% (82 students), relative to the previous year.*
- *The retention rate is above par with University and sector averages.*
- The relative performance of BME students by the remaining indicators is markedly below par with the University average, with completion showing the highest gap. This may be attributed to 11.2% of students not having completed their studies with their cohort; a small proportion (1.2%) of these students is taking longer because they have transferred onto another course.
- The degree attainment rate, although below University average, is above par with the sector average by a marked +10.4%.
- **Compared to the previous 4 years, the most recent year studied above shows an improvement of almost 10% for this KPI. On further investigation, it was noted that the**

<sup>6</sup> UCAS End of Cycle data resource



**Faculties of Business and Health and Life Sciences had registered increases in the good degree attainment rates of BME students by +24% and +14% respectively.**

**The attainment gap between BMEG and White students has lessened from around 16-18% in previous years, to 12% in the most recent year.**

- The employment rate has only marginally declined compared to the previous year. Although lower than the University average, it is above par with the sector. We've maintained the 84% employment rate since last year.

## 2.4 Mature students

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		Mature Students				
	Sector	University	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	25.7% <sup>6</sup>	-	<b>19.6%</b> <b>(4439)</b>	20.0% (4553)	19.3% (4643)	20.6% (4901)	22.4% (5742)
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	15.0% <sup>7</sup>	-	<b>30.3%</b> <b>(1233)</b>	30.7% (1071)	27.4% (1056)	31.3% (979)	33.9% (1232)
<b>Retention</b>	88.2% <sup>2</sup>	92.3%	<b>88.9%</b>	86.7%	87.9%	89.4%	90.0%
<b>Completion</b> <i>% Still studying or transferred</i>	-	83.0% 6.2%	<b>84.4%</b> <b>4.5%</b>	85.4% <b>4.3%</b>	85.8% <b>4.3%</b>	84.3% <b>3.3%</b>	84.6% <b>3.3%</b>
<b>Good Completion</b>	64.0%	80.2%	<b>73.8%</b>	71.8%	72.7%	67.3%	65.4%
<b>Employment</b>	89.1%	88.3%	<b>90.1%</b>	92.2%	88.2%	90.6%	91.3%

Observations:

- A declining trend can be noted in the number of mature applicants in five years (-23% equating to 1303 fewer applicants). In terms of proportional representation, the trajectory is more varied. The sector average for mature applicants has stayed stable (at around 26%),

**A closer look at applicants by Faculty revealed that Humanities and Social Sciences has recorded a consistent downward trajectory in the last 5 years-with the Departments of Law and Education recording most consistent decline.**

- In contrast, entrant numbers have increased year on year in the period studied above. In terms of proportional representation, mature participation has remained around 30%. This may be attributed to a higher offers to enrolment conversion rate (around 51% - 53% in the last 5 years) compared to a much lower 20% for applicants aged <21 years. Mature participation in HE at Brookes is twice the proportion for the sector.**
- Retention and degree attainment rates sit below University average; **although the latter is +9.8% above the sector average for the same indicator. Retention rate is almost at par with the sector.**  
**Although the retention rate in the most recent year has improved relative to last year, it has recorded a downward trajectory in the four previous years. A closer look by particular age bands showed that the 30+ group is the most vulnerable. ACPs have recorded consistent decline in the period studied; it must be noted, however, that numbers being small, retention rates registered for ACPs tend to be more volatile, hence affecting the overall performance rate for this indicator.**

<sup>7</sup> Heidi – HESA Data Resource

- **Similar to the Retention Indicator, low degree attainment rates for mature students cannot be attributed to just one Faculty Department; although Departments of Law and Computing and Communication Technologies have consistently recorded lower attainment rates for mature students.**
- **Employment rates for mature students are above par with University and sector averages.**

## 2.5 Students from Low income families

Lifecycle Stage	All Students	Students from low income families				
	University Average	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	<i>No data available</i>					
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	-	<b>33.3%</b> (1161)	34.7% (1337)	35.4% (1108)	30.4% (1102)	24.4% (928)
<b>Retention</b>	92.3%	<b>91.8%</b>	91.0%	90.3%		
<b>Completion</b>	83.0%	<b>79.0%</b>	87.2%	94.0%		
<b>% Still studying or transferred</b>	<i>6.2%</i>	<i>9.3%</i>	<i>3.6%</i>	<i>0.8%</i>		
<b>Good Completion</b>	80.2%	<b>78.4%</b>	73.3%	71.2%		
<b>Employment</b>	88.3%	<b>86.9%</b>	88.2%			

***N.B. 1. Latest year for entrants = 2014/15 since students may still be in the process of applying for bursaries/loans 2. Student Support Numbers having changed for certain years, there is incomplete historic data in the table above.***

### Observations

- Entrant proportions from this OFFA group have registered decline in the last 3 years.
- Performance against key indicators is lower than the relevant University average.

## 2.6 Students whose parents/guardians have no HE backgrounds

Lifecycle Stage	All Students	Students whose parents/guardians have no HE background				
	University Average	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	<i>No data available</i>					
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	-	<b>35.4%</b> <b>(1442)</b>	36.3% (1263)	38.8% (1495)	35.8% (1120)	33.5% (1216)
<b>Retention</b>	92.3%	<b>92.0%</b>	91.2%	92.9%	93.2%	92.8%
<b>Completion</b>	83.0%	<b>84.2%</b>	86.4%	84.4%	84.2%	85.7%
<b>% Still studying or transferred</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
<b>Good Completion</b>	80.2%	<b>80.8%</b>	74.8%	70.8%	73.6%	73.3%
<b>Employment</b>	88.3%	<b>88.1%</b>	90.7%	88.2%	88.1%	88.6%

### Observations

- The proportion of entrants from families with no prior higher education backgrounds has been quite varied in the last five years. However, the latest year has seen an increase in absolute numbers (179 more students); proportionally there has been a marginal decline of -0.9%.
- This OFFA group has recorded results which are above University average across most performance indicators.

Research commissioned by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills<sup>8</sup>, in considering factors associated with dropout rates from higher education found that 'students with parents who had not been to university were more likely to have dropped out than those with parents who had a university education'.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Business, Innovation & Skills – Learning from Futuretrack – Dropout from Higher Education, 2014

## 2.7 Students from Low participation areas

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		POLAR 3 (Young Participation rate)				
	Sector	University	Latest Year	Previous four years			
<b>Applicants</b> (Base Population)	26.2%	-	<b>16.0%</b> <b>(3723)</b>	15.9% (3668)	15.5% (3504)	15.3% (3592)	15.3% (2960)
<b>Entrants</b> (Base Population)	11.4% <sup>5</sup>	-	<b>17.4%</b> <b>(493)</b>	18.5% (447)	16.0% (448)	18.1% (390)	13.1% (314)
<b>Retention</b>	-	93.3%	<b>90.1%</b>	90.1%	91.0%	97.7%	98.4%
<b>Completion</b> <i>% Still studying or transferred</i>	-	81.7% 7.8%	<b>79.9%</b> 7.5%	85.2% 3.7%	88.5% 4.5%		
<b>Good Completion</b>	66.0% <sup>3</sup>	81.9%	<b>81.0%</b>	70.1%	72.8%		
<b>Employment</b>	89.5%	87.6%	<b>88.8%</b>	90.8%			

*N.B. 1. Latest year for applicants = 2014/15; data source UCAS (EXACT);*

*2. University Average = <21 years only; 3. Historic data incomplete where post code information has been archived*

### Observations

- The last 5 years have seen consistent growth in applicant numbers (+25%) from low participation areas. The sector has seen a similar trajectory<sup>9</sup> in the period studied in this report.  
In terms of proportional representation, the sector average has remained at 25-26% in the last five years; although Brookes has sustained proportions at 15-16%, it has not yet bridged the 10% gap with the sector.
- Entrant numbers from low participation areas have been on a consistently positive trajectory. Proportionally, Brookes sit comfortably above the sector average (by +6%) in the most recent year).
- Application to offer conversion rates have been consistently lower for students from low participation areas compared to those from higher participation areas. Applicants from POLAR 3 Q1 and Q2 have recorded offer rates of 59-60% versus 67-69% for those from Q3 to 5 .All other indicators show marginal gap with University averages; the employment rate for this OFFA group is above par with University average and slightly below sector average.
- Performance on the good completion indicator is markedly above sector average by +15%.

<sup>9</sup> Offa Press Release – January 2016