

Widening access report 2023/24



700riel
YEARS OF PEOPLE & PLACE





We are ambitious to admit the best students to Oriel. So we want to attract the greatest number of talented applicants, regardless of their background.

LORD MENDOZA CBE
PROVOST

Foreword from the Tutor for Admissions and Outreach

Widening access to higher education is critical to the present and future success of universities and colleges, but also for social mobility at large.

To sustain the highest academic standards, we must continue to admit the students who stand to perform the best academically. Attracting a wide pool of applicants to choose from at the admissions stage is the key step to achieving this objective. We cannot admit students who never apply.

Our admissions process is meritocratic. Places go to applicants who are considered to show the most academic potential. Widening access is as much about excellence — about admitting the best and brightest students, wherever they come from — as it is about fairness.

It is as simple as this: we do not want to miss out on the opportunity to educate aspirational students with promising futures just because they have been fettered by circumstances outside of their control.

Working with schools, charities and regulators to raise aspirations and

attainment levels of all UK students, higher education providers have made a strong start in addressing access disparities.

But we must keep up our efforts to ensure continued progress. This is the *raison d'être* of the University of Oxford's new five-year access and participation plan, beginning in 2025/26.*

We will only truly be able to say that we have attained our goal when every aspiring young person views going to university as a viable choice for their future and can access the education they need to realise their full academic potential.■

Professor Julien Devriendt

Tutor for Admissions and Outreach

* See page 18





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Foreword from the Outreach Officer

For the past eight months it has been a pleasure to pick up from where my predecessor Arron O'Connor left off as Oriel's Outreach Officer. The figures indicate that 2023/24 was exceptionally busy, with a total of 92 events from the start of one July to the next.

Visits to Oriel from cohorts of aspirational students from state schools are by far the most frequent events on our outreach calendar. During term time there can be as many three visits in a single week

These visits offer students who might not be familiar with Oxford the chance to be inspired by the city and meet current students. They also challenge preconceptions about higher education, ensuring that talented students are not deterred by outdated stereotypes about who universities like Oxford are for.

In my role I also regularly travel to our link schools to run sessions on the admissions process and higher education. Occasionally, I collaborate with my counterparts at other colleges, both at Oxford and at Cambridge.

State schools often lack the resources to offer support to talented students who aspire to study top universities. Fortunately, we can do our part to fill the gap, addressing access disparities by helping disadvantaged students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to make competitive applications.

Engaging with students beyond our link regions, in 2023/24 we renewed our successful partnership with Generating Genius for a third year. We once again ran the STEM@Oxbridge programme with the charity, and this was also expanded to include a poster competition for year 13 students.

The Easter study day residentials were yet another highlight of the previous academic year. Through these residential programmes, a total of 134 year 12 students from state schools had the opportunity to stay overnight at Oriel, before being inspired by a day of academic lectures. Many of these students have since applied to Oxford, and I'm delighted to say that two have received offers to study at Oriel.

I look forward to continuing our programme for the remainder of the 2024/25 academic year. The Tutor for Admissions and Outreach and I continuously review our activities and I am currently busy reviewing our evaluation procedures, which help us understand how to support students.■

Carys Owen
Outreach Officer





Oxford's regional outreach strategy

The majority of Oxford's UK undergraduates are state-educated, but at 67 per cent,* the proportion is still lower than the percentage of pupils who attend state schools in the country.†

Geographical disparities, meanwhile, catch an early footing. Only about 27 per cent of the total UK population lives in London and the South East, but the percentage of UK applicants from the two regions is nearly double that.‡

To attract the best applicants, the University adopts a regional outreach strategy, Oxford for UK, which assigns colleges link regions to target with what resources they have available.

The regional approach guarantees that outreach work at the University is not only comprehensive but also sustained and tailored, with local barriers to higher education access thoughtfully considered for every region and school.

Link regions

Oriel College has seven link regions. Most of these are located within

the West Midlands (Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Worcestershire and Herefordshire) but they also include two London boroughs (Kensington and Chelsea, and Richmond upon Thames).

All non-selective state schools in link regions have full access to Oriel's outreach programme, which includes free visits to Oxford, visits to and talks at schools, and support for Oxbridge applicants. Thanks to generous alumni support, the activities are free of charge to schools, travel costs inclusive, so that geographical distance from Oxford is never a barrier to access.■

* www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures

† www.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2023-24

‡ www.statista.com/statistics/294729/uk-population-by-region/

Analysis by link region

Walsall

- 7 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 81% contact with schools
- 21 events in 2023/24, including Walsall Schools Tour

Wolverhampton

- 18 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 67% contact with schools
- 3 events in 2023/24

Dudley

- 22 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 73% schools belong to multi-academy trusts
- 50% contact with schools
- 2 events in 2023/24

Worcestershire

- 30 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 90% contact with schools
- 33 events in 2023/24

Herefordshire

- 16 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 63% contact with schools
- 7 events in 2023/24

Kensington and Chelsea

- 7 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 86% contact with schools
- 5 events in 2023/24

Richmond upon Thames

- 7 non-selective state schools and colleges
- 86% contact with schools
- 6 events in 2023/24



From a school visit to an Oxford education

Thirteen-year-old Sam would never have guessed that she would be writing this from the Oriel College library eight years later. On 18 October 2017, my secondary school, Turing House School, took a trip to Oxford through Oriel's outreach programme, and I can truly say this changed the trajectory of my life. Scrolling through old school newsletters, I found the mention of my year 8 school trip alongside a picture of all us students standing on the steps leading up to the Hall. I have so many new memories of those steps now, from fresher's formal and preparing for the annual pancake race, to performing in the garden play and rushing to Governing Body meetings as JCR president in my second year.

To have been in the position of the students I now lead around the quads and answer questions from is strange to say the least. But it is also amazing. I remember sitting in the lecture theatre asking Oriel students what a usual day looked like, taking a tour through the

quads, being simultaneously impressed and intimidated by the castle-like facade. By the time we headed back to the coach to be taken back to London, I had made up my mind: I was definitely applying to Oxford. When it came to my application in sixth form, I was not scared, I already had a reference for what the hallowed halls of Oxford looked and felt like, and it somehow seemed not so impossible to imagine myself there, so I went for it.

As my BA now draws to a close, I am left feeling uncertain and nostalgic, but so proud of that 13-year-old who dreamt of exactly what I am lucky enough to have experienced during my time here, surrounded by wonderful people, incredible professors, and more libraries than I could ever need.■

Samantha Hardaker

Student ambassador





Samantha Hardaker (2022), right, in a production of *Twelfth Night* at Oriel College



Study Day residential programmes

During the Hilary term vacation, 134 year 12 students attended a Study Day residential programme at Oriel College — up from 78 students in 2022/23.

The aim of the programmes is to inspire aspirational and high-performing students from non-selective state schools to apply to degree courses at top universities like Oxford and Cambridge. For 2023/24, each programme covered one of Modern Languages and Linguistics, History, English or STEM, offering students taste of what it is like to study the subject area at Oxford.

Women in STEM

The 2023/24 STEM Study Day residential programme was only open to applications students who identify as women or non-binary. Women account for less than a third of the global STEM workforce. And this disparity starts at a young age, with fewer female students choosing STEM subjects like engineering and computer science at every juncture in their education.

“Everyone was very lovely and answered my questions when I was unsure. I thought it was a very helpful experience which allowed me to confirm my interests!

— STUDY DAY PROGRAMME ATTENDEE

Progression

30% of the students who attended a Study Day residential programme in 2023/24 applied to a degree course at Oxford in the 2025 entry admissions cycle. Of the students who applied, 35% received offers (double the 2021–23 average application-to-offer rate at Oxford). Two of the students received offers to study at Oriel College.■



Collaboration and partnerships

Collaboration and partnerships, with both access and social mobility charities and other higher education providers, are a key part of Oriel College's strategy to widening access.

Many charities are well-resourced and have specialist knowledge about the unique obstacles that students from different demographics and backgrounds face in accessing higher education. However, it is largely by collaborating with universities and colleges that they are able to transform university participation into a realistic possibility in the minds of students.

A significant predictor of students seeing higher education a viable choice for their future is attendance at visits to campuses and colleges, where they can hear from and be inspired by lecturers and speak with current students.

Generating Genius

Oriel College has had a long-term, successful partnership with the charity Generating Genius, which was founded by Lord Sewell CBE in 2024 with the objective of raising the next generation of STEM leaders. For three years, the college has collaborated with the charity to offer a programme which prepares sixth-form students from Black and African Caribbean or low socio-economic backgrounds for STEM degrees at top universities.

In 2023/24, the partnership with the charity expanded to include St John's College, Cambridge, and was renewed for 2024/25. This allowed students on the programme to experience life and study at both historic universities.

In collaboration with Generating Genius, Oriel College also ran a poster competition in 2023/24. Year 13 students were tasked with completing an independent research project on the theme of "exchange", then presenting their research as a poster. The posters were marked by subject experts at Oriel, with awards going to best ones.

GENERATING GENIUS 2023/24

June 2024: STEM@Oxbridge information session

July 2024: poster competition guidance session

August 2024: study day at Oriel College

August 2024: study day at St John's College, Cambridge

September 2024: Oxbridge admissions preparation day

October 2024: poster competition award ceremony



I am proud that Oriel College is a part of Lord Sewell and Zindzi Sewell's vision for Generating Genius. We will continue to work with the charity in our productive and long-term partnership.

LORD MENDOZA CBE
PROVOST

Walsall Schools Tour

The annual Walsall Schools Tour, a collaboration with Newnham College, Cambridge, ensures sustained contact with cohorts of year 10 students from nine schools across Walsall. In 2023/24, the tour followed the same three-stage format as in previous years.

- **March 2024:** the Outreach Officer from Oriel College and School Liaison Officer from Newnham College visited Walsall for two days. Together they delivered 12 talks about higher education and applying to Oxford and Cambridge.
- **June 2024:** nine of the schools visited in March each nominated ten year 10 students to visit Oriel College (30 at a time) for a day and explore Oxford.
- **October 2024:** the same 90 students visited Newnham College (30 at a time) for a day.

Aurora Foundation

The Aurora Foundation is an Australian Indigenous organisation that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to realise their full education and employment potential. In October 2023, a cohort of prospective postgraduate students were taken on a tour of Oriel College by Ethan Taylor, a master's student and recipient of the Aurora Foundation's Charlie Perkins Scholarship, as part of the Oxford leg of the organisation's UK Study Tour.

The Brilliant Club

The Brilliant Club is an educational access charity that offers programmes for students from backgrounds with historically lower progression to higher education. In February 2024, Oriel College supported a day of activities for a cohort of 14 graduates from the charity's Scholars Programme. ■



STEM@Oxbridge participants visited Oriel College for a study day in August 2024





Look ahead: 2024/25

The 2023/24 widening access programme has not only raised the aspirations of many students but also furnished them with the knowledge and skills they need to prepare competitive applications that accurately reflect their talent. There is more to be done, however, to ensure that every student is able to receive an education to the level that is appropriate to them. With this in mind, there are two main objectives for the 2024/25 academic year.

Improve tracking and evaluation

The main objective for 2024/25 is to improve evaluative and tracking mechanisms. This work will not only demonstrate the reach and impact of our widening access programme but also create an evidence base that provides useful insights into intervention outcomes and the progression of students, from different demographics and geographical regions, into higher education, vocational training and careers.

The work has already begun. Tracking the attendees of the 2023/24 Study Day residential programme has revealed that as many as 30% went on to apply to a degree course at the University of Oxford in the 2025 entry admissions cycle. 35% of those who applied later received offers, including two from Oriel College.

Increase engagement

Establishing contact with teachers at non-selective state schools in link regions is the first step to enabling students

there to access our widening access programme. Yet many schools are underresourced, and this can serve as an early roadblock to engagement.

A key priority for 2024/25 is to increase engagement with schools in Wolverhampton and Dudley. Wolverhampton has 18 non-selective state schools, with contact established with 12. In Dudley, there are 22 non-selective state schools, and contact has been made with only 11. Oriel College is exploring collaborative schools tours in both regions with Girton College, Cambridge. These would be modelled on the successful Walsall Schools Tour with Newnham College.

Notably, 73% of the schools in Dudley belong to multi academy trusts. Contact with these trusts will be central to improving engagement in the region, and will remain a focus.

Access and participation plan

The University of Oxford has published an access and participation plan, approved by the Office for Students, for 2025/26 to 28/29. The plan details current access targets at the University as well as other access, success and progression measures and also outlines the financial and other on-course support available to students. The plan is available at <https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/app>. ■







Communications Office

Oriel College

Oxford

OX1 4EW

Tel: 01865 286 541

Email: communications@oriel.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.oriel.ox.ac.uk

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