

Widening
access report
2024/25



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

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TUTOR FOR ADMISSIONS AND OUTREACH

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Foreword from the Outreach Manager

In this year's report I want to take time to reflect on who we are engaging with, how we work with them and why we do it. While entering higher education is a step students typically take when they finish year 13, **the groundwork for the decision is often established much earlier.**

Whether it be because students have unknowingly chosen A level subjects that don't allow them to progress onto the course they wish to study, or they've simply never had the means to leave their local region to see a university campus in real life, there

are all sorts of factors which can limit a student's options when they come to deciding about their next step in education. Especially for students from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education, **if we can reach them earlier on with resources tailored to their age group and background, then we stand a better chance of making a lasting positive impact.**¹

This is one of the main reasons why we don't just measure the success of a year's outreach work in that year's college or university admissions statistics: **our work is part of a slower, longer-term project**



Carys Owen speaks with prospective students at an Oriel College Open Day

¹ Students underrepresented in HE include students from state schools, Free School Meals/Pupil Premium eligibility, BAME backgrounds, women and non-binary students in STEM, POLAR4 Quintile 1 and 2 home postcodes

to increase access to higher education, especially Oxbridge, for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

This is as part of our commitment to the University of Oxford's Access and Participation Plan for 2025/26 to 2028/29, but also something we should be proud of contributing to as a college that values academic excellence wherever it may come from.

While it is sometimes appropriate to track the progression of students we work with through HEAT (Higher Education Access Tracker), we also measure our achievements against the responses of our students and teachers: Was the event inspiring and enjoyable? Has it changed their perspective? Has it helped guide their application process?

With an average teacher rating of 4.97/5 for all our visits to Oriel last year, **I am reassured that we're doing something right**, but it's in understanding the aims of each event with more clarity that we gain a better picture of our impact.

Writing this report has helped me to reflect on all of our varied outreach activities over the past 12 months. It's amazing to see how much has happened. Looking forward to 2026, the 700th year of our college, I'm excited to see what work we can do to support possible future university scholars.

Carys Owen
Outreach Manager

2024/25 in numbers

Overall activity

Outreach events	Students reached	Outreach hours
121	3,696	334
+29 from 2023/24	+1,575 from 2023/24	

Activity locations

Location	Events
Oriel	63
Schools	37
Online	14
Other	7

How events were organised

Organisation type	Events
With schools	89
With charities	10
College collaborations	13
Student self-nomination	9

Analysis by link region

Walsall

- 17 link schools
- 82% school participation in 2024/25
- Predominantly urban area with the highest percentage of Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintile 1 schools in our link regions

Wolverhampton

- 20 link schools
- 32% school participation in 2024/25
- The most multicultural and densely populated of our West Midlands regions

Dudley

- 22 link schools
- 10% school participation in 2024/25
- Black Country borough with four main towns, mainly 11-16 schools and a small number of large sixth form colleges

Worcestershire

- 32 link schools
- 63% school participation in 2024/25
- Large geographic region with variety of school structures (eg different age ranges) and many small towns

Herefordshire

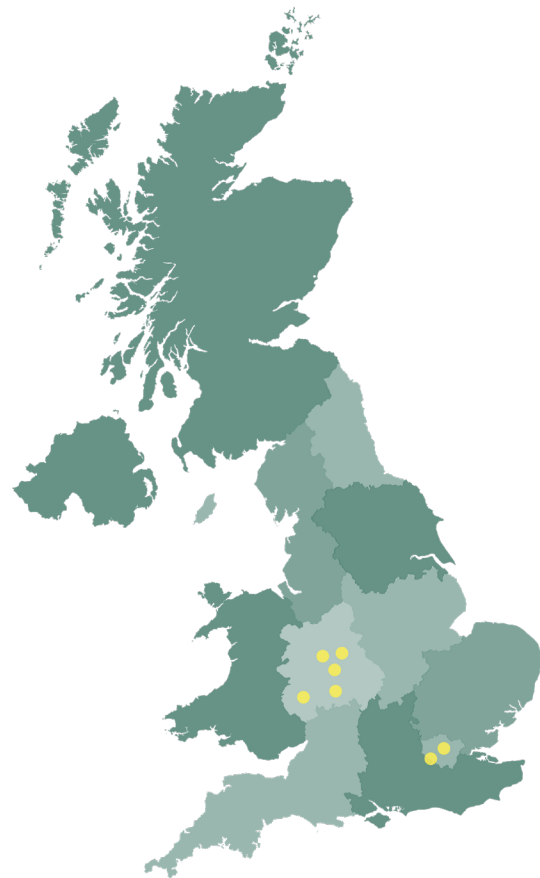
- 17 link schools
- 24% school participation in 2024/25
- Our most rural region with unique challenges

Kensington & Chelsea

- 7 link schools
- 71% school participation in 2024/25
- Areas of high deprivation next to high wealth in the heart of London

Richmond upon Thames

- 12 link schools
- 50% school participation in 2024/25
- Outer London borough with reasonably low levels of deprivation



Our strategic approach

Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14)

We start working with students from Year 8, which for most UK students is the second year of their secondary school education.

With these younger students, **the core aim is to introduce the idea of higher education in a positive, engaging, and unintimidating manner.** This is mainly done through school trips to Oriel College, which expose students to a university campus at an early age.

As well as talks on higher education and the chance to meet current students, our Key Stage 3 visitors also take part in activities such as Oxplore workshops, which encourage students to think about "Big Questions" while developing oracy and critical thinking skills.

Often, students also go on city tours and visit museums, exposing them to Oxford and the cultural enrichment it offers.

“The visit to Oriel College was an amazing opportunity for our students to discover Oxford and to consider aiming high for their post 18 options

— YEAR 8 TEACHER

“It is a fantastic visit and students really enjoyed it and felt inspired

— YEAR 9 TEACHER



Caris Owen, Outreach Manager, with students on a school visit to Oriel

Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16)

For our interventions with link schools, Key Stage 4 is a crucial age group to reach and our activities with these students make up the majority of our school-based engagement, both in College and outbound.

While students are often under pressure to focus on their GCSE grades, meaning we see little of Year 11 students from January onwards, keeping their eye on the horizon for what comes next is equally important.

With this age group, we **continue to promote the breadth of options available in higher education, including Oxbridge, and introduce more ideas about application processes, entry requirements and which A Levels facilitate different degree options.**

This work is especially relevant to students in link schools which don't have sixth forms, helping them to think about what college and qualification type to pursue next. Demystifying barriers to

higher education (such as university finance) is also important for this age group because it helps prevent students from disengaging with the idea of attending university altogether.

Teachers of all age groups can select different visit options to best fit their students' needs. However, popular options in Oxford for Key Stage 4 include second college tours, which allow students to see more of the university, and academic taster sessions. The taster sessions introduce students to university subjects which they may not have yet considered. In 2025, we organised taster sessions in History, English, History of Art, Material Sciences, and Law.

All visits also include the chance to speak to current student ambassadors, who help act as role-models and demystify day-to-day life at the university.

Key Stage 5 (ages 16-18)

By the time we work with students in Key Stage 5 the process of applying to, and attending, university is less abstract and quickly approaching.

Our aim with these students is **to help them make informed choices when selecting courses and universities, and to teach students how to make competitive applications to Oxbridge and other 'high-tariff' universities.**

During school visits we continue to cover the basics of higher education and Oxbridge. There are opportunities to speak to current students, and we also run workshops on application preparation and independent study skills. These help give students the confidence that they know what to

“I really enjoyed speaking to uni students and seeing an insight into what a day in the life looks like

— YEAR 10 STUDENT (WALSALL SCHOOLS TOUR)

“[It was] really good to set out the amount of work and resilience needed for academic study, positive and friendly

— YEAR 10 TEACHER

expect from the application process and that they have begun to develop the skills they need to be competitive applicants.

We also offer 'Interviews Explained' workshops for students at link schools who are awaiting Oxbridge interviews.

Study Day residentials

As well as school visits, our Study Day residentials are a major part of our engagement with Year 12 students. During these four one-night residentials, state school students from across the UK attended a series of academic taster sessions and admissions talks, giving them a taste of what life and study at an Oxford college for their chosen subject might be like.

The residentials can be invaluable for students as they are deciding where to apply. The in-person component allows

“It really helped me see how people like me can be in Oxford. Even speaking to student ambassadors I felt like I could see myself in each of them which really helped

— LAW RESIDENTIAL ATTENDEE

“I found that getting to know the different sorts of people that wish to and have joined Oxford was the most enjoyable. It was a really inclusive atmosphere

— WOMEN IN MATHS AND COMPUTER SCIENCE RESIDENTIAL ATTENDEE

them to get a genuine experience of a degree before they apply.

As well as helping students confirm their degree choices, **the residentials provide valuable 'super-curricular' content to discuss in their university application.** Many also form networks of students with similar aspirations.

In 2025 we held Study Days for PPE, Law, Maths and Computer Science, and Chemistry and Biochemistry. The Maths and Computer Science and Chemistry and Biochemistry Study Days were only open to female or non-binary students.

In the 2026 admissions cycle, 34 per cent of Study Day attendees made applications to Oxford. Of those applicants, 31 per cent successfully received an offer.

2025 RESIDENTIAL FEEDBACK*

- 90 per cent agreed that attending the Study Day helped to shape and support their university application
- 61 per cent felt they were very likely to consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge after the programme, compared to 29 per cent beforehand

* Based on 89 survey respondents out of 134 attendees

Rex Nettleford Essay Prize

Another offering for Year 12s at Oriel College is the Rex Nettleford Essay Prize, a competition that **challenges students to engage with the legacies of colonialism in an independent research project.**

The competition encourages students to attempt a university-style research project on an important topic of ongoing debate as well as providing content that they can include in personal statements. The 2025 winners and runners-up were invited to attend a prestigious lecture at Oriel College, delivered by Gary Younge, award-winning author and journalist.

The competition had a record number of 135 entries. While the competition is open to all UK students regardless of school type, a change in 2025 was that one of the two £250 prizes was reserved for a student from a link school.

To make the competition more accessible to students who may not have attempted such a project before, we ran an online webinar on essay writing and study skills alongside the competition. This was attended by more than 50 students, 18 of whom went on to submit competition entries.

Orwell Prize recipient Gary Younge, Dr Nicholas Gaskill and Provost Lord Mendoza with the prize winners in the 2025 Rex Nettleford Essay Prize winners



Our partnerships

The Brilliant Club

In 2024/25 we joined an official Oxford consortium of 12 colleges to partner with The Brilliant Club. This UK charity aims **to improve opportunities for students from less advantaged backgrounds to access higher education through their Scholar’s Programme**, offering state school students a tutorial-style learning programme with trained PhD students.

At the end of the Scholar’s Programme programme, Oriel College hosts a graduation event where students get to celebrate their achievements, see a university environment and speak to current students.

HEAT data indicates that students on the Scholar’s Programme during Years 7, 8, 9, or 10 were more likely to achieve a 9-5 in Maths and English than students within the same schools who had similar middle prior attainment at Key Stage 2. Their data also indicates that Scholars Programme graduates tend to progress to higher education and achieve top-class degrees at rates above the national average.¹

In 2024/25, Oriel hosted three graduation days for the Scholars Programme, welcoming 94 students from eight different schools.

Generating Genius

Oriel College has an ongoing partnership with Generating Genius, an educational access charity who **work with UK students of Black African and Caribbean heritage and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to support progression to competitive STEM degrees and careers.**

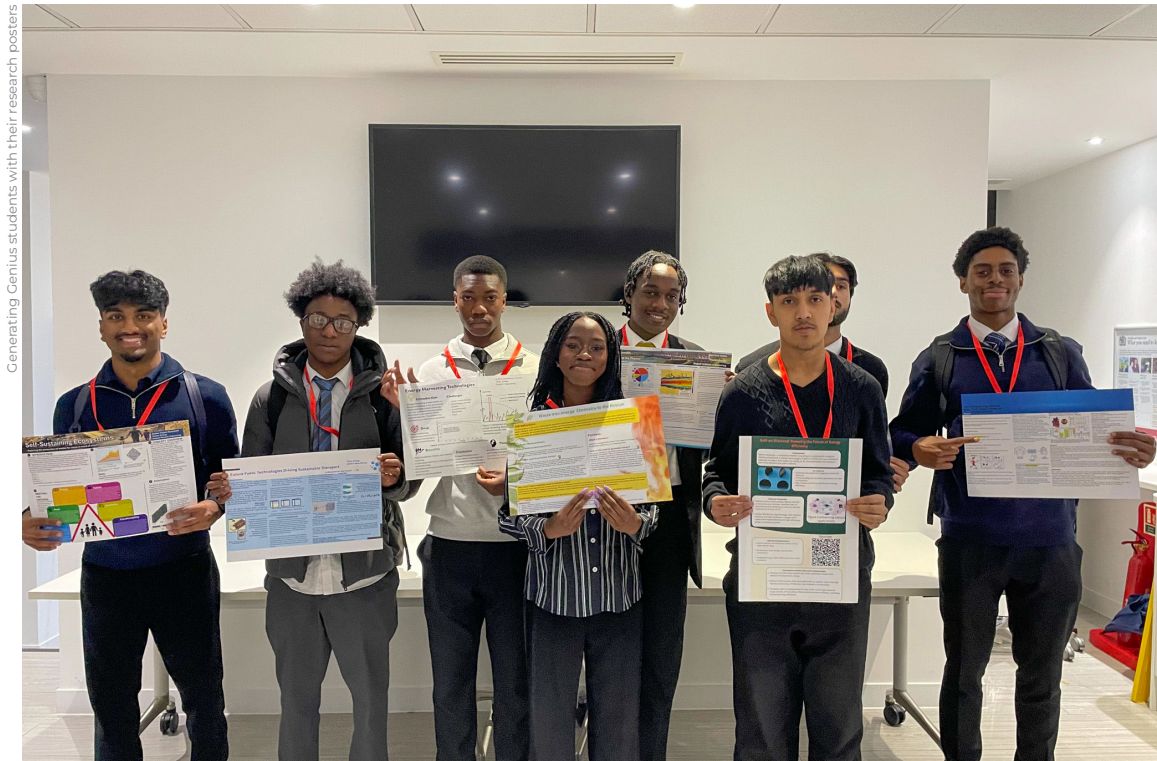
Studies show there is an increasing demand for STEM roles in the UK labour market, which often have higher salaries for graduate students than non-STEM subjects, but unequal access to such opportunities for groups including those from certain ethnic backgrounds, and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.² Generating Genius's aim is to widen access to these futures from students who may have otherwise not had the opportunity.

“[Generating Genius] was one of the most helpful programmes while I was applying to Oxford as it gave me a much greater insight to the application and being with people from similar backgrounds to you aiming for similar goals is really special to me”

— SECOND YEAR MATHS STUDENT AT UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

1 The Brilliant Club and Oriel College, University of Oxford, Annual Impact Summary 2024/25.

2 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmsselect/cmsctech/95/report.html>



Generating Genius students with their research posters

This programme runs from May through to October, consisting of a variety of in-person and online events for the 61 participating Year 12 students, all of which aim to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for competitive university applications. Many of these sessions were supported by graduate students and tutors at Oriel College, who delivered academic workshops and interview question practice.

As part of the programme students also participated in an academic poster competition, researching and presenting on a chosen topic related to the theme of Energy. All competition entrants attended a celebration event in October at the Computacenter London office where the five prize-winners received their awards.

In an update on the 2024 Generating Genius cohort, 42 of the students have since started STEM degrees. 32 have taken up places at Russell Group

universities, including two at Cambridge and three at universities in the US.

Worcestershire and Herefordshire Week – Christ’s Cambridge

As part of an ongoing collaboration in our link regions, November 2024 saw another year of our Worcestershire and Herefordshire Week in collaboration with Christ’s College, Cambridge. **Over a period of five days, we delivered 19 talks at 14 schools across the two counties, uniting to deliver talks at the two major sixth form colleges.**

Talks were for students in Year 10 all the way through to Year 13 applicants. Following the week we also delivered an additional online session for Year 13 applicants. For these regions, where the population is spread across large rural areas and small towns, a focused week in the locality holds great benefit for maximising reach and productivity.

Walsall Schools Tour – Newnham Cambridge

A long-established fixture in the Oriel Outreach calendar, this is our multi-intervention scheme with link schools in Walsall run in conjunction with Newnham College, Cambridge.

In this three-part programme, Year 10 students receive a talk at their school in March, and then participating schools are invited to bring 10 students each to Oxford in May, and Cambridge in October. Teachers were encouraged to invite students who were on track for achieving strong GCSE grades, but also students who qualified for Free School Meals and/or would have been the first in their family to enter higher education.

The idea behind the programme is that **a multi-intervention approach (more than one interaction with the**

same group of students) can help reinforce messages around A Level and university options, emphasising the breadth of courses available and a demystified view of Oxbridge.

Aurora Education Foundation

The Aurora Education Foundation is an Indigenous organization that **supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to realise their full education and employment potential**, supporting students from high school all the way through to postgraduate study.¹

This year we again welcomed their Postgraduate Study Tour to Oriel College for a tour and dinner. This programme supports prospective Aboriginal postgraduate scholars to see top UK universities and ask questions about what postgraduate admissions and study would look like at these institutions.

While largely our outreach work is focused on teenagers within the UK, there are significant educational barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders face to even complete high school, which makes supporting their achievement at the highest level even more important.² This ongoing relationship has been borne out of previous Oriel MCR president Ethan Taylor's relationship to the charity.



School students having lunch in Hall on a visit to Oriel College

1 <https://aurorafoundation.com.au/our-work/high-school-program/>

2 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/education-statistics-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/latest-release>

Looking forward to 2025/26

The 2025/26 academic year is **the first time Oriel Outreach has had two dedicated members of staff, thanks to the generous support of a donor.**

Accordingly, September 2025 saw the arrival of Ivana Kuric as our new Outreach Officer.

In the first instance this is a fixed-term post of one year, but we hope to make this expansion a permanent addition and have established targets which will show that our expansion has positively benefited the quantity and quality of our outreach work and its evaluation.



Our ambitions for 2025/26

School visits	Up to nine additional inbound school visits during the year
Virtual events	More virtual events and multi-intervention programmes
Link region tours	An additional outbound week in Wolverhampton and Dudley
Data and analysis	Collect more individual student feedback from students





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