

Oxford Brookes' performance against widening participation milestones (2016)

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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 underrepresented 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 underrepresented 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 its 2017/18 Access Agreement, Oxford Brookes has committed to taking a more focused approach to its widening participation performance by examining the recruitment patterns and academic performance of 4 under-represented groups:

- Disabled Students
- Students from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME)
- Mature students (21 or over)
- Students from low participation areas – students < 21 from POLAR 3 quintiles 1 & 2¹

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
- 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 in our Access Agreement. These targets have been devised by the University in consultation with OFFA. Performance relative to the University average² 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 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.

¹ POLAR3 is an updated classification of small areas used to measure young participation rates in higher education. This gives five quintile groups of areas ordered from '1' (those wards with the lowest participation) to '5' (those wards with the highest participation), each representing 20 per cent of UK young cohort.

²All Undergraduates and select PGT students (on courses charging maximum UG fee level) that are UK domiciled, paying the domestic fee, studying full-time or sandwich out at Oxford Brookes University or franchise colleges.

Data considerations/changes since last report

To drive a more focused approach to widening participation, the University has defined a smaller number of underrepresented groups for targeting and monitoring purposes. Therefore, we are no longer reporting on:

- students whose parents have no HE background: this data is self-declared and difficult to validate.
- students from low socio-economic backgrounds: the work of the Performance Indicators Steering Group (PISG) concluded 'the data used for the [social class] indicator is widely acknowledged to be of poor quality'.
- students from low income families (defined as those receiving a Brookes bursary): this data is partial and only available for students who are income assessed.

The completion indicator, with reference to the student lifecycle stages, will not be reported on due to concerns in interpretation of the metric data. The indicator is based on a student's expected completion date and is a static field in our student record system. By this we mean it will not change if the student takes longer to complete or completes earlier. Because of a large number of extending students with unknown completion status, this year's completion metric will always be very poor compared to previous years, which makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions.

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 that each measure is based on:

- Applicants – 2016/17 entry year (with the exception of BME and low participation data)
- Entrants – 2016/17 entry year
- Retention – 2015/16 entry year
- Good Completion – 2015/16 leaving year
- Employment – 2014/15 leaving year

The latest Access Agreement required the University to set annual targets up to the year 2021. The 'OFFA target' in the tables that follow refers to the 2016-17 milestone. OFFA will review our performance against our annual milestones to ensure we are making adequate progress towards our overall ambitions (as reflected by our 2021 targets).

Performance against widening participation milestones

2.1 Disabled students

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		Disabled Students					
	Sector	University	OFFA Target	Latest Year	Previous four years			
Applicants (Base Population)	10.1% ³	-	11%	12.5% 2,841	12.4%	11.3%	11.4%	10.3%
Entrants (Base Population)	14.7% ⁴	-	15%	15.5% 609	17.2%	18.0%	18.7%	16.5%
Retention	88.8% ⁵	93.2%	93%	91.6%	93.2%	92.3%	93.1%	93.1%
Good Completion	73.9% ⁶	78.7%	75%	81.2%	77.0%	73.5%	69.6%	72.7%
Employment	87.3% ⁶	88.1%	87%	86.0%	85.0%	85.4%	84.5%	84.7%

Observations:

All OFFA targets have been exceeded for this group with the exception of a marginal difference for retention (-1.4%) and employment (-1%). Brookes performs consistently above the sector average on the access, progression and outcomes measures relating to disabled students with the exception of a slight gap in employability rates but the comparison here is not statistically significant.

- The proportion of **applicants declaring a disability has risen gradually over the five year period**. The University sits comfortably above the sector average (12.5% vs 10.1%) as it has done in previous years.
- Data on disabled entrants needs to be treated with caution. At the same point in time last year, we also saw a 15% representation rate for 2015/16 entrants which since has risen and is now more in line with previous years (at around 17%). We would expect the 2016/17 figures to also increase as students with a disability (particularly those with learning difficulties) can be diagnosed at any point in their study and their student record will be subsequently updated to reflect this. **Brookes remains above the sector average (15.5% vs 14.7%)** and has achieved its OFFA target.
- Having been relatively stable in previous years and on target, the retention rate has seen a drop this year of around 2 percentage points; this is evident across the majority of disability groups. **Current rates look very strong against the sector (91.6% vs 88.8%)** but sit marginally below the University average and our OFFA target (both 93%).
- Good completion rates show a considerable increase this year, **up 4.1% on the previous year and the highest in five years**. This group now, for the first time in five years, has exceeded the University average good completion rate and also **performs well above the sector average (81.2% vs 73.9%)**.
- Employment rates have continued to increase but remain just below both the University and sector levels. These differences are however not statistically significant.

³ UCAS end of cycle statistics : Number of applicants by disability indicator (2016).

⁴ HESA Statistics: Table 14 - First year UK domiciled HE students by level of study, sex, mode of study and disability (2015/16).

⁵ Equality in higher education: statistical report 2016 - Table reference 2.13 UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants by continuation category and disability status (entry 2013/14 and progression to 2014/15).

⁶ Source: HEIDI Plus: 2015/16 leavers for good completion and 2014/15 graduates for employment metric.

2.2 Students from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		BMEG Students					
	Sector	University	OFFA Target	Latest Year	Previous four years			
Applicants (Base Population)	24.8% ⁷	-	22%	21.6% 4,762	22.6%	20.9%	21.6%	19.2%
Entrants (Base Population)	25.7% ⁸	-	18%	15.8% 617	17.1%	17.2%	16.7%	17.1%
Retention	76.9% ⁹	93.2%	91%	91.6%	92.5%	89.2%	89.3%	92.2%
Good Completion	65.9% ¹⁰	78.7%	62%	66.6%	70.2%	60.9%	60.9%	60.9%
Employment	86.9% ¹⁰	88.1%	85%	84.7%	84.3%	84.7%	76.0%	83.3%

Observations:

Indicators relating to BMEG students have been exceeded for retention and good completion and we are marginally below target on applicant proportions and employability rates.

When compared to the sector average the University fares less well on the access measures particularly entrant proportions (which are significantly below those seen for the sector). BME students are less likely to receive an offer from Brookes than their White counterparts. Applicants from a 'Black' ethnic background in particular report lower offer rates and those who do receive an offer are far more likely to decline it.

On outcomes, the 14 percentage point attainment gap between BME and White students requires attention. On employability rates, those from a 'Black' or 'Mixed' background report comparatively lower rates.

- BME applicant proportions have reduced marginally this year. **Current levels are around 3 percentage points below the sector** and slightly below the OFFA target.

The sector has seen a year on year rise in BME students applying to HE post the rise in fees. This is not unexpected considering the BME population is expected to rise from 13% of the UK population in 2006 to 27% by 2031 and to 43% by 2056¹¹ with minorities represent mostly young groups of the population¹². In contrast, applicant numbers at Brookes have varied from one year to another. **2015/16 reports a 6% decline in BME applicant numbers for Brookes whilst the sector reports a 4% increase.**

The 'Asian' and 'Black' BME groups form around 75% of Brookes' BME applicant pool (77% for the sector). Whilst these groups have seen increased representation at a sector level (Asian +5% and Black +3% increase in applicant numbers in 2015 compared to the previous years), at Brookes these groups have reported a decline (down by 8% and 5% respectively).

- BME entrant numbers follow the same trend as applicant numbers shifting considerably year on year. **Absolute numbers in 2016/17 are down by 9% whilst the sector has seen an increase of 7.6%** in absolute numbers.

⁷ UCAS end of cycle statistics: Applicants and acceptances by groups of applicants 2015.

⁸ HESA Statistics: Table 13 - UK domiciled HE students by level of study, sex, mode of study, first year identifier and ethnicity

⁹ Equality in higher education: statistical report 2016 - Table reference 3.11 UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants by continuation category and BME/White identity (entry 2013/14 and progression to 2014/15).

¹⁰ Source: HEIDI Plus: 2015/16 leavers for good completion and 2014/15 graduates for employment metric.

¹¹ Projections of the Ethnic Minority Populations of the United Kingdom 2006–2056, David Coleman (2010)

¹² A Portrait of Modern Britain, Policy Exchange (2010)

- On entrant proportions, **the gap between Brookes and the sector is more marked and double that for applicants (around 8 percentage points)**. Further analysis on conversion rates may explain the proportional difference in applicant and entrant figures at Brookes. It is notable that **all BME groups report lower offer rates when compared to their white counterparts; particularly those from 'Black' ethnic backgrounds**. Students from **'Black' ethnic backgrounds are also far more likely to reject an offer from Brookes** (44% rejected an offer from Brookes in 2015/16).
- Brookes' performance on the retention metric is far stronger than sector levels (92% vs 77%). Current rates are in line with our OFFA target but fall slightly short of the University average.
- Last year can be considered exceptional in that the University saw around a 10 percentage point increase in BME good completion rates (70% vs around 60% in previous years). This level of performance has not been sustained with rates falling to 66% in the current year but rates still remain higher than the levels reported before the blip. **The current attainment rate of BME students (67%) is comfortably above the OFFA target and sector average (62% and 65.9% respectively)**.

Comparisons between broad ethnic groups (Black, Asian and Mixed) find that Black students show the lowest attainment rates (60.9%), followed by Mixed (68.4%) with Asian students reporting the highest levels (69.7%). **There is a 14% attainment gap between the performance of BME students and non-BME (66.6% vs 80.9%) which, although reflective of the sector (13.6% gap between the two groups), is still a concerning difference.**

- Employment rates of BME students continue to sit around 84% and **sit some way off the University and sector levels**.

The gap between BME and non-BME employment rates has been steadily decreasing over the last four years; 2011/12 leavers saw a difference of 9.8% in employment rates (in favour of non-BME students) which has decreased year on year to show 4.2% in the current year.

Comparisons between broad ethnic groups (Black, Asian and Mixed) find that Black students show the highest employment rates (88.6%) which are in line with those for white students (89%). **Mixed (86.9%) and Asian (81.4%) students report comparatively lower levels.**

2.3 Mature students

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		Mature Students					
	Sector	University	OFFA Target	Latest Year	Previous four years			
Applicants (Base Population)	24.4% ¹³	-	19%	18.3% 4,184	19.6%	20.7%	19.2%	20.3%
					4,444	5,004	4,612	4,811
Entrants (Base Population)	22.5% ¹⁴	-	29%	27.9% 1,094	29.4%	30.1%	26.6%	29.5%
					1,166	1,041	1,011	895
Retention	86.4% ¹⁵	93.2%	89%	90.2%	89.2%	88.2%	88.4%	89.7%
Good Completion	76.6% ¹⁶	78.7%	72%	68.8%	73.4%	72.1%	72.9%	67.4%
Employment	89.6%	88.1%	90%	91.5%	89.9%	91.9%	88.4%	90.4%

Observations:

OFFA targets are exceeded in two measures; retention and employment. Applicant rates are 0.7% below target, entrants 1.1% below and good completion 3.2%.

Brookes struggles to come close to the sector levels in terms of the proportion of mature applicants (a gap of 6 percentage points) and on good completion rates (gap of 8 percentage points)

- The **absolute number and proportion of mature applicants has been on a downward trajectory since 2014**. Absolute numbers are down by 6% in 2016 whereas the sector figures have stayed stable.
- Entrant rates display a similar trend with a steady drop in the proportion of mature entrants at Brookes. However, **Brookes continues to perform well above the sector average on this metric (around 28% vs 24% for the sector)**. Mature students tend to have lower application to offer rates than the Under 21 group (in 2016/17 55% vs. 80%) but notably higher offers to enrols (48% vs 19% in 2016/17).

Almost 50% of our mature students are aged 21- 24 and for this group the entrant figures have stayed the same for 2016 compared to the previous year. The group aged between 25-29 form 21% of our mature population and the numbers have dropped by 8%. **Those aged 30+ form around 30% of our mature population and have seen the biggest drop in actual and percentage terms** (down by 13% and equating to 50 fewer students in 2016).

On a departmental level, **Business and Management has seen its mature numbers fall by almost half from 96 in 2015 to 54 in 2016**. Nursing and Education have also seen a drop in mature numbers but to a lesser extent (numbers down by around 8-9% for both).

- With the exception of 2012, **retention rates have been on a healthy upward trajectory**. Current rates sit **well above the sector level (90% vs 86.4%)** however mature students continue to perform below Brookes' own average performance (93%).
- Good completion rates in the current year are **down by around 5 percentage points** bucking what had been a continuing upward trend in previous years. Analysis finds that a reduction in good honours can be seen in many different subject areas. Notably though Education has seen a drop from 77% to 66% good completions this year.
- **Employment rates remain strong** with mature students outperforming both the University and sector average.

¹³ UCAS end of cycle statistics: Applicants and acceptances by groups of applicants 2016.

¹⁴ HESA Performance Indicators: Table T2a - Participation of underrepresented groups in higher education: UK domiciled mature full-time undergraduate entrants (2015/16).

¹⁵ HESA Performance Indicators: Table T3a and T3d - Non-continuation following year of entry: UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants and other 2013/14 (entry 2013/14 and progression to 2014/15).

¹⁶ Source: HEIDI Plus: 2015/16 leavers for good completion and 2014/15 graduates for employment metric.

2.4 Students from Low participation areas (Under 21 and from POLAR quintiles 1 & 2)

Lifecycle Stage	Benchmarks		OFFA Target	Students from low participation neighbourhoods				
	Sector	University		Latest Year	Previous four years			
Applicants (Base Population)	26.3% ¹⁷	-	20%	19.8% 3,603	19.6% 3,580	19.1% 3,528	18.7% 3,346	18.2% 3,424
Entrants (Base Population)	27% ¹⁸	-	18%	16.2% 456	17.3% 483	18.8% 453	16.1% 448	17.7% 379
Retention		93.2%	92%	93.6%	89.8%	91.0%	91.4%	-
Good Completion	66.0%	81.8%	71%	78.1%	80.5%	69.9%	72.5%	-
Employment		88.1%	90%	88.7%	89.0%	91.1%	-	-

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

Observations:

Brookes is performing on par with its OFFA targets on a number of indicators with the exception of entrants and employability.

When compared to the sector, there are considerable gaps on the access measures and good completion.

- **Applicant rates have risen for the fifth time this year**, although the rise is small on each occasion it is constant. **Despite this Brookes remains well below the sector level (a gap of around 7 percentage points).**
- Entrant rates have been steadily decreasing over the last three years and currently sit well below the sector level and the OFFA target. Students from POLAR Q1 and 2 are less likely to receive an offer from Brookes (60% and 63% respectively) compared to those in Q3 (69%), Q4 (72%) and Q5 (77%).
- Retention rates have seen a notable increase this year sitting only slightly below the University average. **Rates are well above the sector average for 2013/14 by around 8 percentage points.** Brookes POLAR 1 students currently show a 90.9% retention rate (compared to the 13/14 sector rate of 88.1%, POLAR 2 at Brookes also surpasses the sector level (94.9% in 15/16 vs 89.6% in 13/14 sector).
- Good completion rates are well above our OFFA target and outperform the sector for students from POLAR 1 & 2 quintiles. However, this student group does not perform as well as those students from advantaged backgrounds (quintiles 4 & 5) – a gap of 3.7 percentage points in good completion rates in the current year.
- **Students from POLAR quintiles 1 & 2 outperform the Brookes average in terms of employment rates.** They are also more likely to secure employment and further study than those from more advantaged backgrounds (a gap of around 3 percentage points).

¹⁷ UCAS end of cycle statistics: Applicants and acceptances by groups of applicants 2016.

¹⁸ HEFCE- Student Characteristics Under-21 first degree entrants at HEFCE-funded HEIs (2014/15).