Research into the barriers that disadvantaged young people face when applying to Oxbridge

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Summary

Background

In 2018 OxFizz conducted research into the barriers disadvantaged young people face in attaining places at Oxbridge. The findings of this previous report led to a series of questions about what the specific barriers young people are facing are, which skills and mindsets are needed for successful applications, what current provisioning is available to disadvantaged young people, and ultimately to suggest roles OxFizz might be able to play in addressing any concerns raised. These questions were investigated through the use of secondary research, questionnaires sent to young people that work with OxFizz or partner organisations, and finally a series of interviews which were held with providers and a range of other sources.

Findings

- There is a clear lack of long-term support for disadvantaged young people, both in terms of support to acquire the required mindsets and skills for the Oxbridge application process, and the academic support needed to attain the necessary grades.

- Evidence strongly suggests an increase in long term support is a key contributing factor in raising academic attainment and allowing for increased chances of attaining Oxbridge offers. This model of long term support has been successfully employed in the US.

- There is a need for non-academic support, in particular to encourage the soft skills which can assist applicants during the interview stage of the process.

- Schools are woefully under-equipped to deal with the Oxbridge application process, particularly in scenarios where there are only a few applicants per year. Beyond a lack of time and funding, schools also require sign-posting to programmes and resources for the application process.

- There still remain some misconceptions regarding various stages of the application process despite the myth-busting that is currently being done - these misconceptions are largely regarding the interview stage and how each part of the application is weighted.

- 'Significant others' in young peoples' lives need to be targeted in order to help raise their aspirations and encourage academic growth - this needs to occur from an early age.

- The specific skills that young people have stated they are in need of seemed to revolve around the entrance exams and interviews, particularly around the format and timing of each of these aspects, as well as confidence.

Recommendations

- The key takeaway is to tailor OxFizz's support programme in order to provide consistent, long term support instead of one-off sessions addressing individual facets of the application process at a time. In particular, the expansion of the interview support being offered currently should be considered.

- Resources or support programmes should be formulated for both teachers and parents in order to provide larger, more consistent support systems for young people from an earlier age. This intervention would be beneficial as teachers and parents may be able to provide more consistent support than organisations, given that organisations face some constraints regarding the time and resources they have available.

- General academic collaborative sessions should be incorporated into the existing support frameworks in order to develop the soft skills such as articulation that are needed for the interview stage of the application.

- Further targeted research should be conducted (including focus groups) to look at the reasons why young people have certain views regarding each stage of the application process - and identify exactly what shape they want the support available to them to take on.

- Work could be done to identify or collaborate on the production of resources that help tackle the lack of clear signposting about which support currently exists in relation to the Oxbridge application process. This is particularly necessary for geographic areas that have sparse support in their region.

Section 1

Objectives & Introduction

Following on from the previous research report made in 2018, 4 key questions were established as the focus of this current research report:

1. What specific barriers, beyond academic attainment, do educationally disadvantaged young people face in trying to secure places at Oxford or Cambridge?

2. What are the specific knowledge, skills, behaviours, and mindsets do young people need to maximise chances of success in securing a place?

3. What support is already in place to help young people secure places?

4. What role(s) is OxFizz best positioned to play in creating positive learning experiences to support young people to secure places?

The purpose of this research report is to analyse these questions; using the findings to enable us to come to an ultimate conclusion on which activities OxFizz are best able to conduct to facilitate better support of young people.

Our findings were collated through using various methods. Secondary research was conducted in the form of analysing articles and collecting information regarding the admissions procedures that was sourced from other parties. Primary research was also conducted through a series of interviews with providers, as well as the distribution of questionnaires to young people on our programmes.

Section 2

Specific Barriers

2.1   Contextual factors

Statistically, Oxford and Cambridge admit fewer young people from disadvantaged backgrounds than those from more privileged ones. This can be seen through examination of young people admitted from the lower categories of ACORN and POLAR. The former examines geo-demographic profiles with UK postcodes whilst the latter examines the proportion of young people from within a specific area who go on to access higher education. In 2019, 2,079 young people from the lowest two quintiles for POLAR applied with only 355 of these young people being admitted, 14% of the total young people admitted to the University of Oxford; this means that 86% of young people were from the other three quintiles, a large disproportion. Only 12.2% of those from the lowest two ACORN, with 2,097 applications and only 313 young people admitted. 87.8% of young people admitted were thus from the remaining three categories, again indicating a large gap in the socio-economic level of students admitted to Oxford. When assessing the regional variation, a similar disparity can be noticed. 26.9% of students admitted into Oxford between 2017-2019 came from Greater London alone, whilst only 18.8% of students from this region attain the standard A*AA requirement for admission. Scotland has 4.9% of its population attain the standard A*AA but only has a 1.7% representation in the student body for these years. The divide is less than this within England, but still only 8.1% of students were admitted from the North West when their region's share of A*AA was 9.6%. Regional diversification appears, then, to be a barrier to Oxbridge.

Whilst there is an attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers[1], addressing the attainment gap alone has not equalised the representation of young people at Oxbridge and higher education institutes[2]. This suggests that there are other underlying factors that are causing the under-representation of disadvantaged students at Oxbridge. These other factors include the socio-economic factors discussed above as well as racial barriers. Oxbridge have begun using contextual data indicators; such as free school meals, care leaver status, POLAR, and ACORN in their admissions process as a way of taking into account the other factors affecting disadvantaged young people. However evidence states that this process either needs to be expanded, or used alongside other methods instead of being the sole acknowledgement of disadvantage[3]. This is largely as a result of both contextual offers showing no gap in attainment at the end of the degree process, and also evidence showing that "equal examination grades do not represent equal potential".

Another contextual factor that affects disadvantaged young people, with regards to Oxbridge applications, is their mobility. Social class is a key factor which drives the mobility choices of young people and statistics show that disadvantaged young people are less likely to leave home and travel further. Over three times more young people in the lowest social class group commute to university from home than do so from the highest group (44.9% compared with 13.1%[4]). Controlling for other factors including class, location and attainment, state educated young people are 2.6 times more likely to stay at home and study locally than their privately educated counterparts[5]. British Pakistani and British Bangladeshi young people are over six times more likely to stay living at home and study locally than their white counterparts. Whilst cultural differences might explain some of this disparity, another contributing factor identified by Sutton trust is that many universities remain

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[1] Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *Higher education: the fair access challenge*.

[2] Milburn, *University challenge: how higher education can advance social mobility: a progress report by the independent reviewer on social mobility and child poverty*.

[3] Boliver, Gorard, and Siddiqui, "Using contextual data to widen access to higher education".

[4] Donnelly and Gamsu, *Home and Away: Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility*.

[5] Ibid.

white-dominated spaces, limiting university choices for BAME young people who may feel more comfortable in a more diverse university. The reduced likelihood of disadvantaged young people leaving home for university limits their ability to apply to Oxbridge if they do not already live in the cities of Oxford or Cambridge.

2.2 Aspiration raising

Research into the barriers that disadvantaged young people face in attaining places at Oxbridge has frequently brought up the need to raise aspirations. There have been links made between raised aspirations and academic attainment in later years (as well as other life goals). Evidence suggests this is something which must be dealt with at an early age[6], especially for economically disadvantaged young people, to enable them to have the best chance of achieving the higher grades needed to progress.

Research suggests that the process of aspiration raising should be done by 'significant others'[7] (this phrase refers to key individuals within the lives of young people, such as parents or teachers). By having prolonged contact with these mentors in academic capacities not only are young people's aspirations raised, but attainment and future earnings also rise.[8] It appears to be that sustained contact is key in order for these interventions to be effective.

2.3 Long term Support

One of the biggest barriers for disadvantaged young people in attaining places in Oxbridge was found to be a lack of long-term support; in both an academic sense and in terms of information about subject choices, grades, etc.[9] It was found that by working with students continually from a much younger age than is usually done (as current schemes largely begin their work in Year 12), young people managed to achieve higher grades. Some reports suggest that[10] this does not work towards raising aspirations, (a key factor mentioned before), but that this form of engagement would encourage the actions needed to attain the goals set by the young person. There are some schemes like this in place at other British institutes, such as the '*Up for Juniors Scheme*' by the University of Portsmouth, which was found to have a beneficial impact on the academics of the young people.[11]

2.4 Schools

Research has identified that schools have difficulty with the timing and commitment necessary for Oxbridge applications[12]; this could potentially be addressed by access organisations having prolonged partnerships and training sessions with schools, as a lack of awareness about the Oxbridge application process is often highlighted as a weakness for schools.

Another issue identified is how much of the information provided to young people is actually retained by them in the long term[13]. Student ambassador schemes were piloted and shown to be quite effective in addressing this, and also improving later life-goals such as employability, and crucially, academic progression. Such schemes would be invaluable for Oxbridge applications given the niche information needed, which often young people are best equipped to handle. However, the training and resource creation (the latter required by both the ambassadors and the teachers alike) can quite easily be handled by access programmes.

2.5 Subject choice

Subject choice is another problem for disadvantaged young people applying to Oxbridge. Whilst no subject at Oxford is fully representative of the lower two quintiles of POLAR, Theology and Religion had a 22.7% representation in the years 2017-2019, the largest proportionally of all the subjects. The lowest is Geography, with only a 5.5% representation, and then comes Classics, with only an 8.1% representation. ACORN statistics show the same issues, with Geography having a

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[6]Mullen, *Widening access to higher education: admissions (SPICe Briefing; 10/07)*.

[7]Morgan, *On the Edge of Commitment: Educational Attainment and Race in the United States*.

[8]Heckman, Pinto, and Savelyev, "Understanding the Mechanisms through Which an Influential Early Childhood Program Boosted Adult Outcomes".

[9]Baker et al., "Aspirations, education and inequality in England: insights from the Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project".

[10]Atkins and Ebdon, *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*.

[11]Law et al., *Can changing aspirations and attitudes impact on educational attainment? A review of interventions*.

[12]Cullen et al., *Research to understand successful approaches to supporting most academically able disadvantaged pupils*.

[13]Gartland, "Student Ambassadors and STEM Outreach: A study of practices in the USA".

6.4% and Classics a 6.1% representation from the lowest two categories[14]. Classics is perhaps easier to explain statistically, since "*In 2010, researchers estimated that classics was taught in only 25% of state schools, compared with 75% of schools in the independent sector*"[15]; thus, there is a lack of exposure to the subject to those who are more likely to be in the lower categories for ACORN or POLAR (see also Appendix A for some insight from Charlie Hailes on this).

For Geography, closer investigation is needed since it is a subject offered on the National Curriculum. However, the curriculum offered nationally for Geography is very different to the reportedly elitist geography that is taught at the University of Oxford: "*In Britain, Geography errs toward accepting more of the affluent, not least because so many more of them apply to study it. In Britain it is the subject that the future king (William) took at St Andrews. It is the subject that the founder of the 2018 British Brexit Party studied at Christ Church, Oxford. It was the subject studied by the recently departed Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party, Theresa May. . . it is, and remains , the favourite subject of those who create hostile environments for immigrants, who create political parties that border on the fascist, of war-mongers, bankers and imperialists*"[16]. Whilst Dorling might be taking an extreme view, it does highlight the association of the subject to elitism and the political world.

Further research on subject choice has identified that young black people are said to apply disproportionately for the three most oversubscribed subjects (medicine, law and business)[17]. According to Vidal Rodeiro, this is consistent with the idea that ethnic minority students and their families strongly prefer subjects that lead directly to traditional professional occupations or that develop the skills needed to be successfully self-employed. As a result of this, in comparison to their white peers, ethnic minorities are less likely to cite personal interest as the reason for their subject choice and are more likely to cite employment and career plans[18]. This may affect their performance in interviews and their ability to show enthusiasm for their subject choice.

2.6   Application process

The Oxbridge application process is multi-layered, involving the writing of a personal statement and interviews (over three days for Oxford or one day for Cambridge). As with applications to all universities, predicted grades, teacher references and other contextual data is included in the application. Oxbridge will have an additional element in the process, such as teacher marked essays which must be sent in or some subject-related examination.

The Sutton Trust has identified some potential barriers in this process: "*Students often rely on their school to give them advice on where to apply, on their personal statement, and on preparation for any interviews involved in the application process. However, some schools are much better at this than others, giving students advice early on regarding A level subject choices, university and course choice, and guidance on the application process. In comparison, other schools do not give the same level of support, with many young people, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, often not getting the level of advice and support that they need... Indeed, independent schools often offer considerably greater access to extracurricular activities, which are both commonly referred to in personal statements, and which help to build essential life skills such as communication - likely to be of help in any admissions interviews.*"[19] Further, students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not stand a chance from the offset might be called to interview in order to interview enough applicants: "*if a pupil with good grades had attended a "bad school" then their chances of obtaining an interview were higher than a pupil with similar grades who had attended a "good school"*" (and who was therefore seen as having not achieved much)[20].

[14]University of Oxford, *Annual Admissions Statistical Report*.
[15]Classics for All, *Who We Are*.
[16]Dorling, "Kindness: A new kind of rigour for British Geographers".
[17]Boliver, "Exploring Ethnic Inequalities in Admission to Russell Group Universities".
[18]Connor et al., *Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Social Class Groups*.
[19]Montacute and Cullinane, *Access to Advantage: The influence of schools and place on admissions to top universities*.
[20]Wyness, *Rules of the game: Disadvantaged students and the university admissions process*.

Section 3

Knowledge, skills and behaviours: Questionnaires

These questionnaires were distributed to around 500 young people who are participating in access programmes. Of these, 43 responses back were received, of which 42 consented to allowing the data from their responses to be used in this report.

The first question asked was for the young people to rank the importance of college choice to them with 1 being not important at all, and 5 being very important. As shown, many young people seemed to find college choice on the greater end of that scale, but still hovering around the midway point. This would imply that while worth looking into (for them), college choice is not a pressing concern.

How important is your choice of college?

42 responses
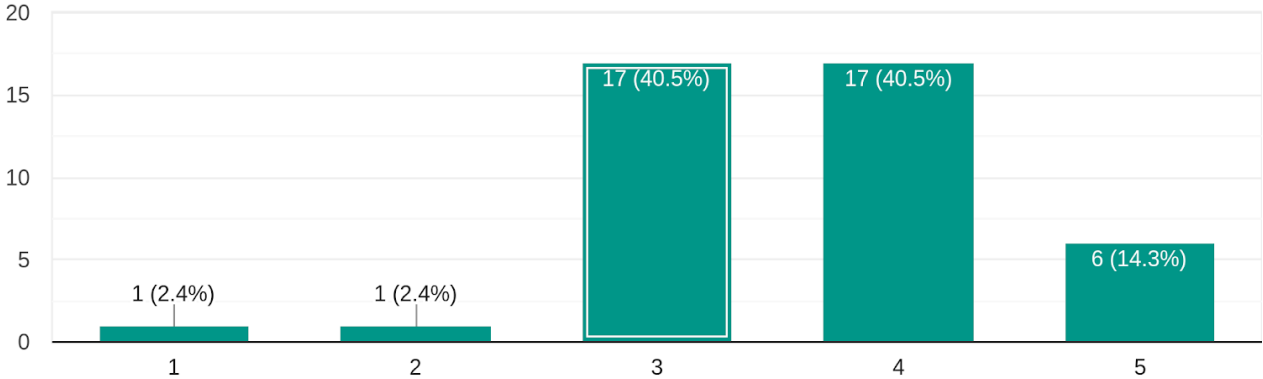
When looking at which aspect of college choice is the most important for young people, the aspect which was identified as such the most frequently is the financial support available. Reputation of colleges also plays a large part in their choice - being the most frequent choice of the second and third most important concern. It is maybe not surprising, given the survey demographic, that financial support carries such weight for young people when making their college choice; however the results of this question, more generally, shed some interesting light on the students concerns regarding college choice.

How would you rank the importance of each of these aspects when considering your college choice on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not important at all and 5 being the most important
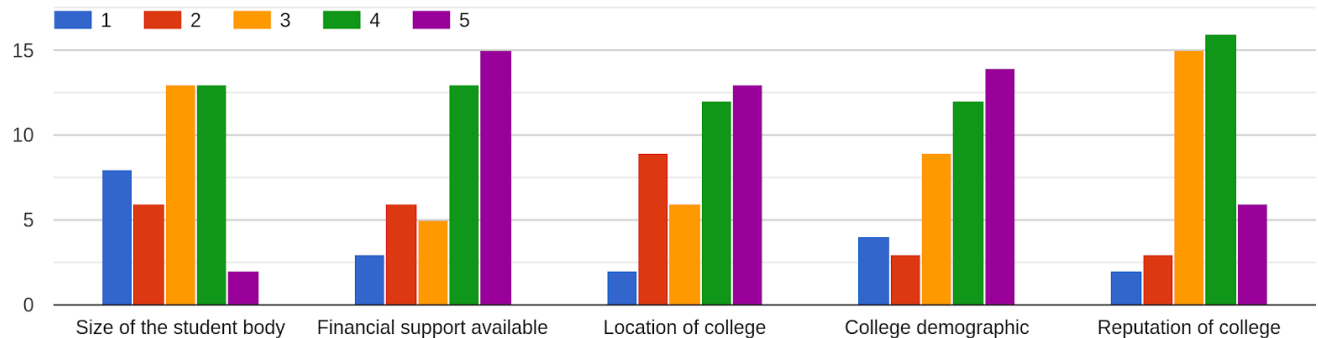
Of particular note was that when asked to list other factors, if any, which were important to choosing a college, 11 out of 21 responses were to do with the accommodation available - be it concerns about the rooms, catering (e.g. whether Halal food was offered) or just mentioning accommodation itself. Here, when asked about the financial concerns related to studying at Oxbridge (with 1 being not concerned at all, and 5 being one of the most concerning) we note that for most responses, finance was regarded as being seen as a concerning aspect as opposed to not being a concern at all.

How concerned are you about the financial aspect of studying at Oxbridge?
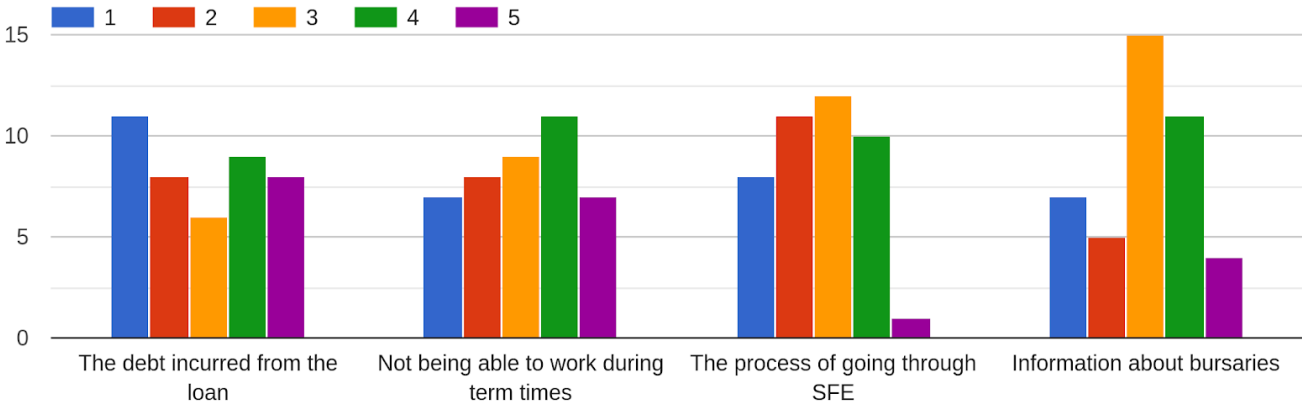42 responses

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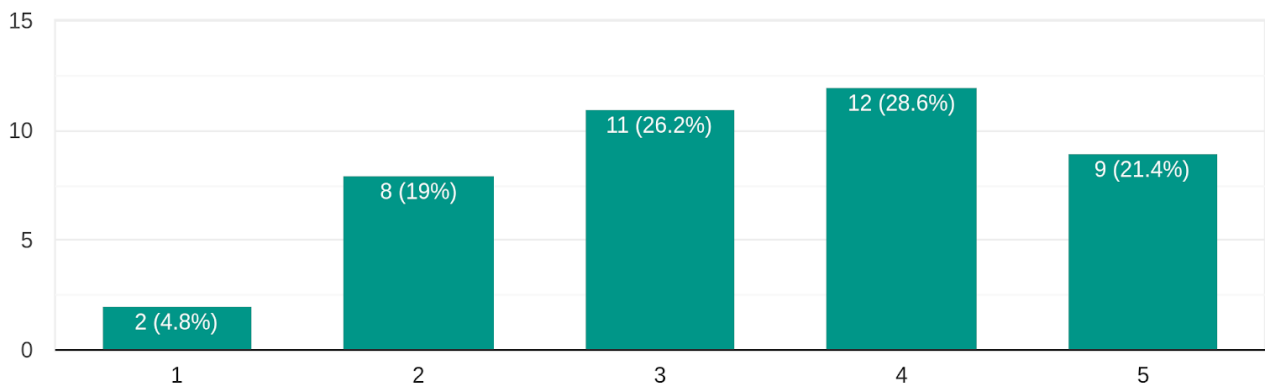
However, in the follow up question that asks '*how much of this financial concern is specific to Oxbridge?*' (with 1 being much less than other universities, and 5 being much more than other universities) we note that it seems that this is usually a concern for all universities in general, and overall Oxbridge presents less of a concern than other Higher Education institutes.

How much of this financial concern is specific to Oxbridge?
42 responses
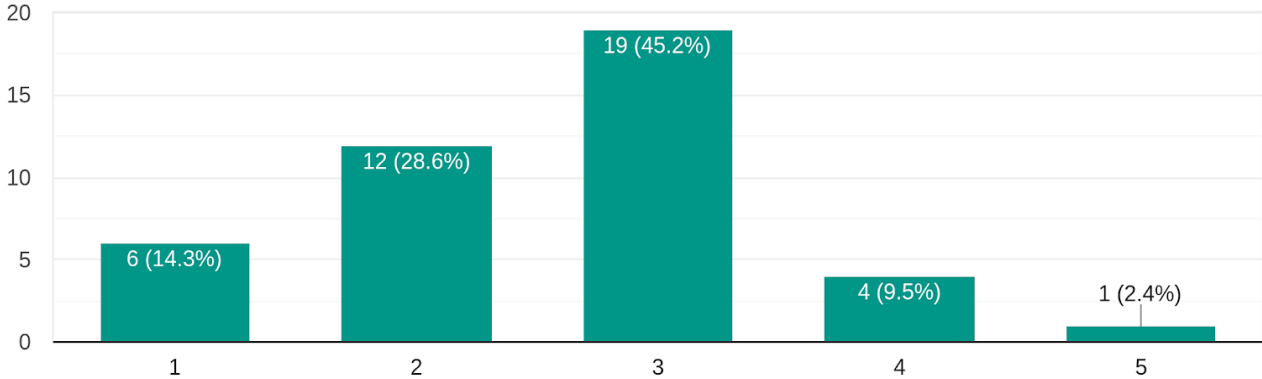
When asking about specific financial concerns young people had, we note that there is no specific concern which stands out - but we do note that in general not being able to work during term times, as well as the debt from the loan both present greater than average concern. However on the latter point, it is also interesting to note that debt is most often not concerning at all for young people. Furthermore, the Student Finance process and information on bursaries both are not usually the most pressing concern.
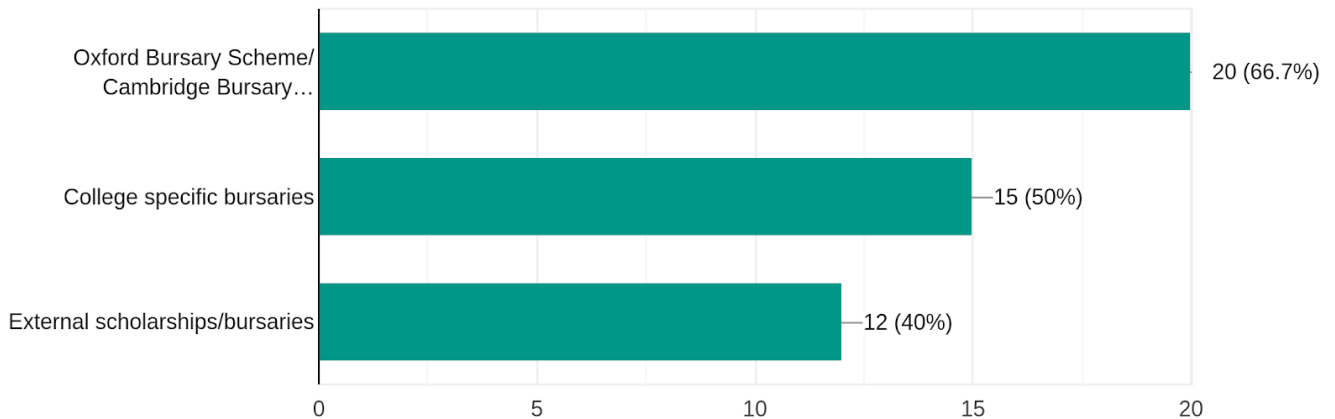
How concerning are each of these financial aspects to you on a scale of 1-5 , with 1 being not concerning at all and 5 being very concerning.

When asked to describe which aspects of financial support they have looked into, we see that half the responses mentioned looking at college level while 2 in 3 looked at the university level. This may represent further need to inform young people about the financial support available at different levels within the university, particularly given the concerns they had.

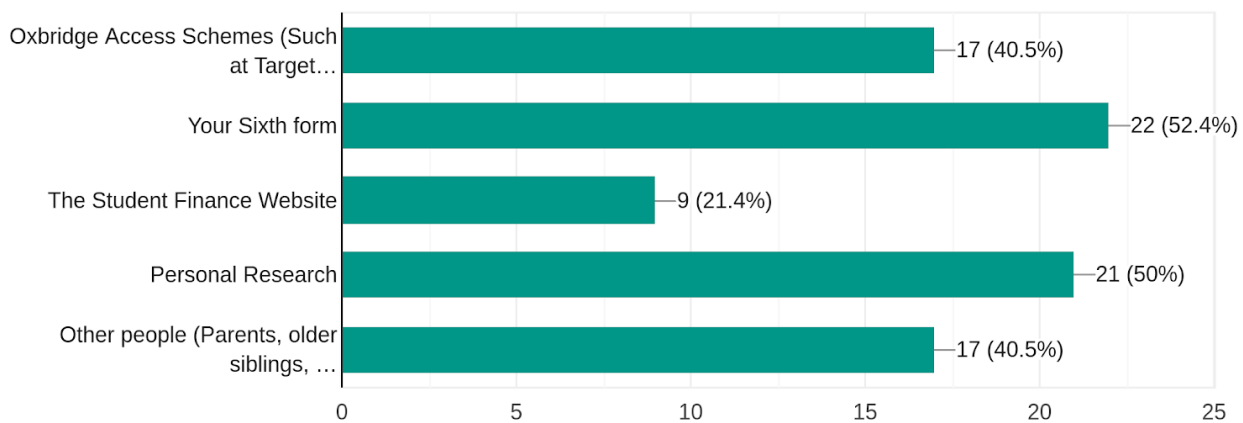### Which of these financial support options have you looked into?
30 responses

Option	Count
Oxford Bursary Scheme/Cambridge Bursary…	20 (66.7%)
College specific bursaries	15 (50%)
External scholarships/bursaries	12 (40%)

Next, we looked at which sources the young people looked at for financial support. Slightly surprising was the fact that very few looked at the Student Finance England website itself - despite it having much of the information they would need. Furthermore, we note that almost half look at access scheme websites - so perhaps this is something OxFizz can bear in mind when constructing its new website.

### What sources have you looked at to gain an understanding of the financial support available to you?
42 responses

Source	Count
Oxbridge Access Schemes (Such at Target…	17 (40.5%)
Your Sixth form	22 (52.4%)
The Student Finance Website	9 (21.4%)
Personal Research	21 (50%)
Other people (Parents, older siblings, …	17 (40.5%)

The next question looked at what young people felt were the most important aspects of the application process. We note that GCSE results were largely overstated, and in some cases understated! That is to say - some applicants felt GCSEs were more important than *both* the interview and entrance exam. This misconception could be harmful in discouraging applications. Further, we note that often the entrance exam is weighted as less important than the personal statement, which might be another idea to be looked at. It is good to see that the interview is weighted heavily, but it seems clear from these results that young people need to be made aware of the importance of each aspect of the application process.

When applying to Oxbridge, how would you rank the importance of each of these aspects of the application from 1-5, with 1 being the most important aspect and 5 being the least important
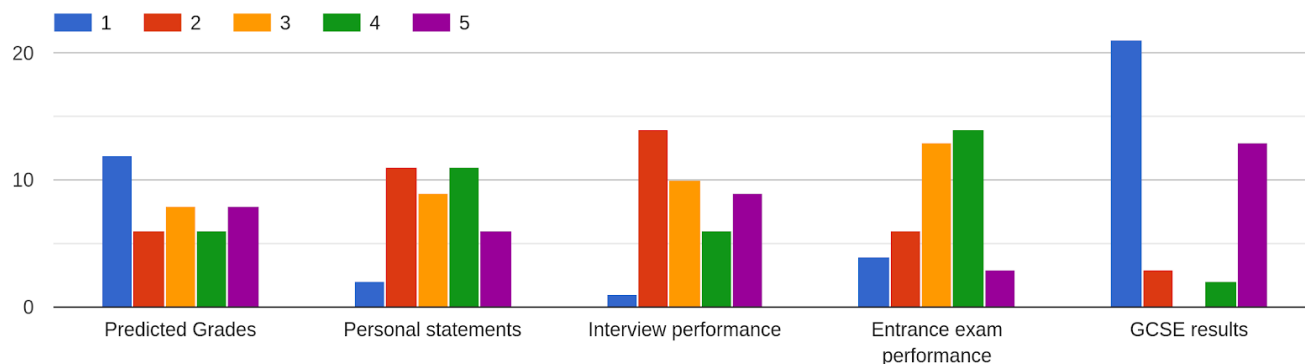
When asked to say which aspect of the process (from the entrance exam, interview, and personal statement) is most difficult to prepare for, the responses are perhaps not surprising, with the interview being found the most difficult by far.

Of the following options, which do you feel is the most difficult to prepare for in order to make a succesful Oxbridge application?

41 responses
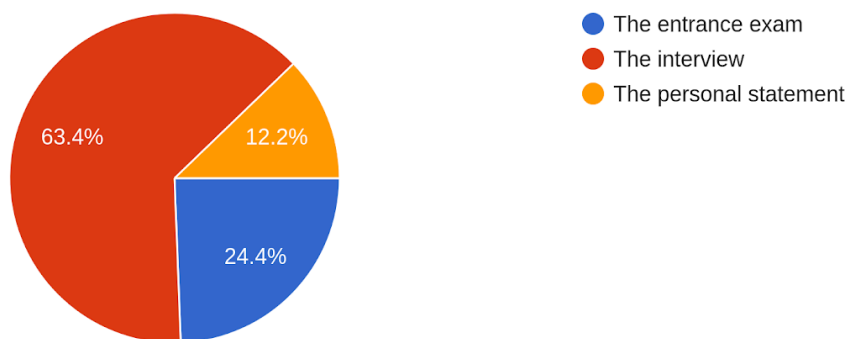
Next, when asked to describe which aspect of the above was found to be the most difficult, we received 38 total responses. Of these, 11 mentioned general uncertainty (e.g. concerns on what shows up on the exam), and 9 on difficulties in preparing for the associated aspect. It's particularly noteworthy that 5 responses were regarding concerns about convincing tutors of their passion for the subject; whilst this is a major part of the interview process, it's interesting that young people did not mention problem solving or thought processing as a point of difficulty in their preparation for interviews. On the basis of the concerns stated, it may be useful to provide young people more support in these specific areas.

When the young people were asked about what they wanted from external sources such as OxFizz, we received 26 responses. 19 of these were simply interview or entrance exam preparation, with 7 solely requesting only entrance exam resources/preparation, 5 solely interview preparation, and the rest a mix of the two.

Looking then at whether the young people view their Oxbridge applications as more important than their other university applications (with 1 being equally important to all other applications, and 5 being the most important), the results seem encouraging - showing the young people largely do view their application to Oxbridge as quite important and so this discourages the view that there might be a lack of motivation for disadvantaged young people when applying to Oxbridge.

Do you view your application to Oxbridge as more important than your other university applications?

42 responses
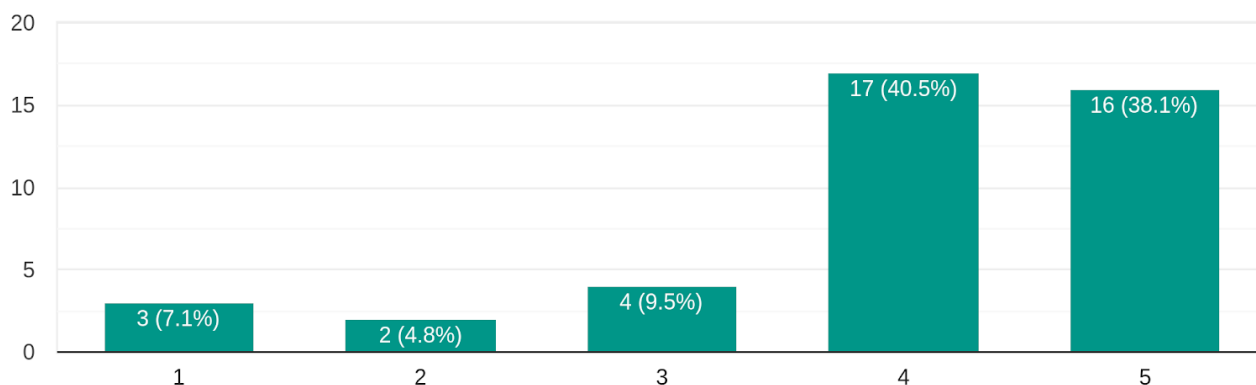
Another encouraging figure was that almost all of these people were willing to invest more time into the application process for Oxbridge - showing again perhaps lack of a motivation is not a major barrier for disadvantaged young people when applying to Oxbridge.

Are you willing to invest more effort/time into preparing for your Oxbridge application, compared to your other university applications?
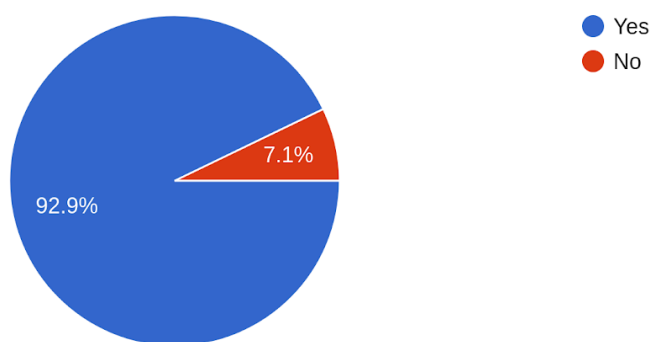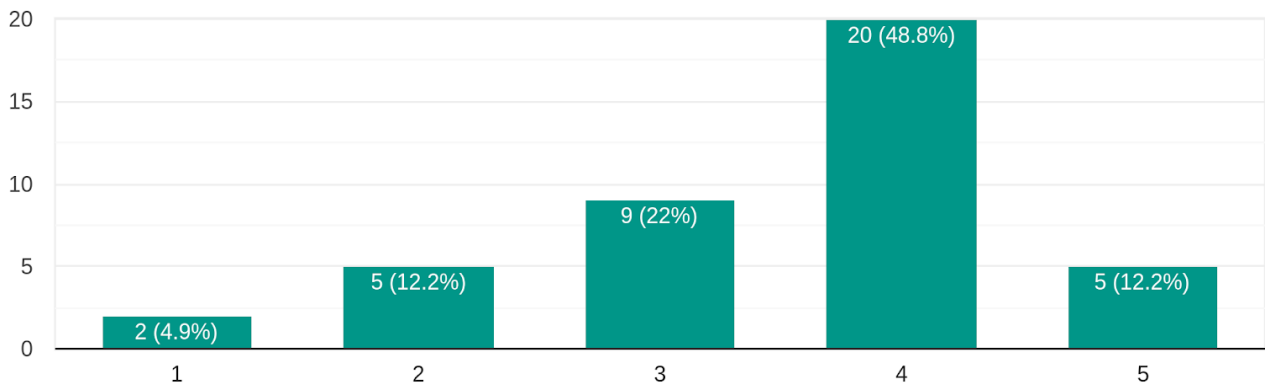
42 responses

Next, when asked about which specific skills the respondents would like to gain to perform better at the entrance exam, we received 37 responses. Of these, a surprising 18 responses were regarding working under the timed conditions required, with the rest of the responses being a mixture about specific parts of the exam (e.g multiple choice questions). However when asked which aspects of the entrance exam are the most concerning, only 8 responses were regarding timing. This may show that while students believe they need support on timing, they do not find this issue particularly pressing. In the future, it might be helpful to have multiple testing sessions run in order to gauge performance and improvement, particularly with a focus on problem solving techniques; this practice should help tackle the concern of timing.

Next, we asked the young people how confident they were with knowing what the entrance exam and interview were assessing, with 5 being the most confident and 1 the least. As a whole, the young people seemed to be fairly confident in knowing what the entrance exams are assessing however, the findings show that students were more confident in knowing what the interview is assessing. Therefore, this may mean that young people require more support for the entrance exam as opposed to the interview stage of the application process.
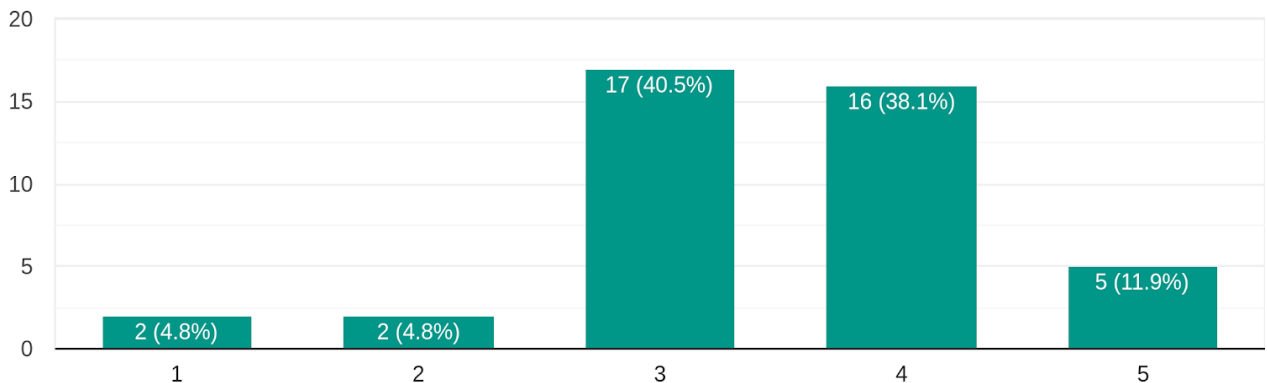
On a scale of 1-5, how confident are you in knowing what the interview is assessing?
41 responses

On a scale of 1-5, how confident are you in knowing what the entrance exam is assessing?
42 responses

We then asked specifically, which skills do the young people believe they need to perform well in the interview, and we received 39 responses. It was pleasing to note that almost all young people responded with well-informed answers - stating that the interviews targeting critical thinking, facing unfamiliar problems and the like. When asked to explain which skills they would like to gain, we received 33 responses, of which 13 were about gaining confidence and 11 to do with explanation skills. The issue of confidence might be resolved with further practice interviews, or facilitating for young people to have discussions with unfamiliar adults/peers more regularly. As for the explanation skills, the small tutorial sessions might be able to rectify this to a certain degree.

Next, when asked about the most daunting part of the interview, we see that largely the interview format and process itself are the factors causing the concerns. This again should be able to be rectified with further practice interviews, although this may well present financial and logistical concerns.

Which of these aspects is the most daunting part of the interview:
42 responses

Legend:
- Facing unfamiliar problems
- Being made to explain/justify your methodology in approaching questions
- The content of the interview
- The act of being interviewed itself
- Not knowing enough about the interview process
- Being discriminated and viewed differently than other candidates due t…
- being asked what exactly made me w…

Now, looking at Oxbridge in general we asked whether young people felt as though the Oxbridge application process was worth the extra effort needed to get in - and again it seemed most agreed, suggesting that disadvantaged young people are motivated during the application process.

How far do you agree with the statement 'The application process for Oxbridge is worth the extra effort needed to guarantee a place, compared to other universities'
42 responses

Legend:
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
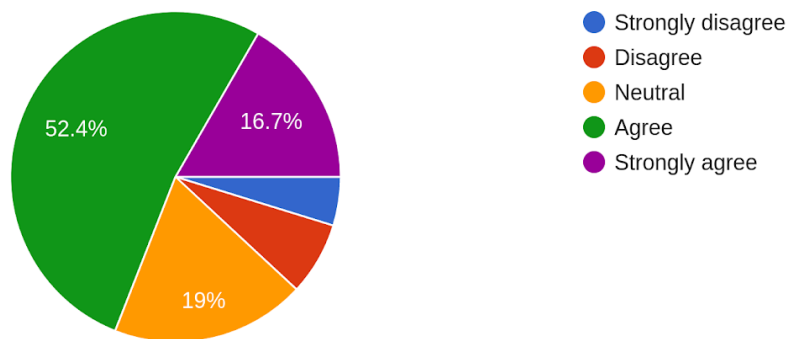
Further, we asked what factors were the most appealing to young people when applying to Oxbridge, and for most (perhaps unsurprisingly) the employment opportunities stood out the most.

Which of these do you feel is the most appealing aspect of applying to Oxbridge, in terms of non academic factors:
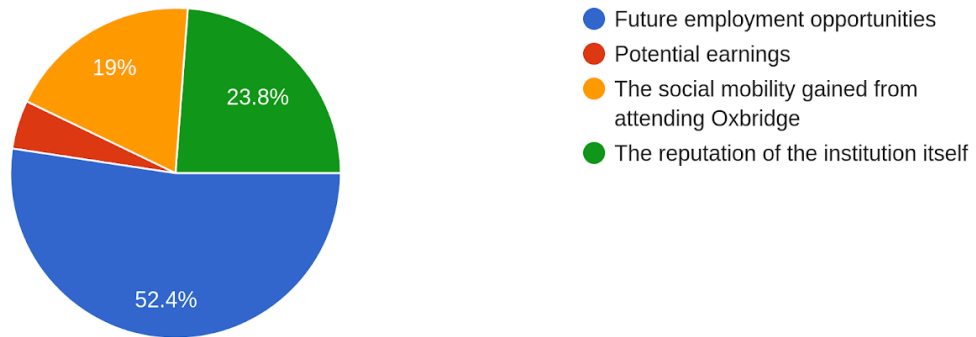
42 responses

- ● Future employment opportunities
- ● Potential earnings
- ● The social mobility gained from attending Oxbridge
- ● The reputation of the institution itself

Another encouraging figure was that when asked whether the young people had felt discouraged from applying due to GCSE results (with 1 being not at all, and 5 being one of the greatest concerns), most seemed to be not discouraged or only a small amount. We should bear in mind that previously a large majority of young people responded that they believed GCSE grades were one of the most important components of the application process.

Have you felt discouraged in applying to Oxbridge due to your GCSE results?
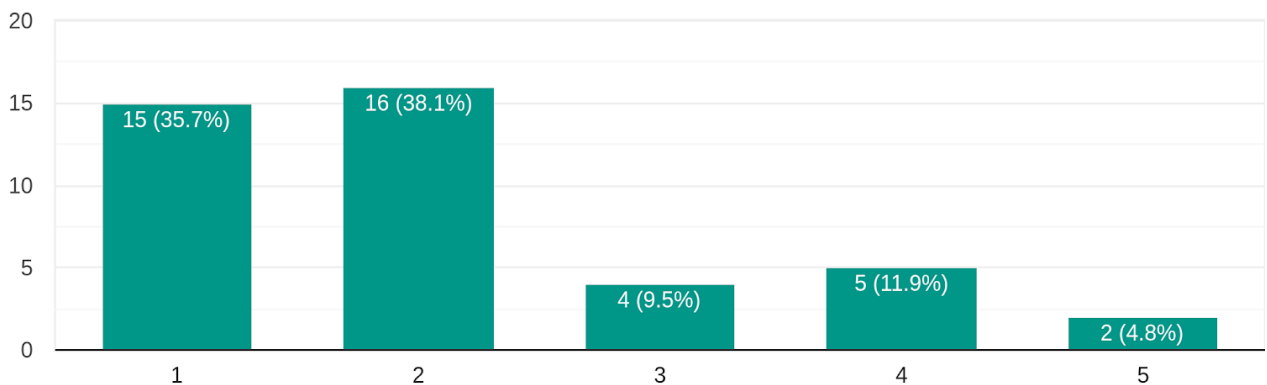
42 responses

When asked about any further factors discouraging applications, we received 17 responses. 5 of these were to do with the workload at Oxbridge (which is admittedly higher than average due to several factors), but 4 were to do with socio-economic diversity. This again, is perhaps unsurprising but provisions could be provided to alleviate these concerns.

Asking now whether they felt that Oxbridge adequately considered contextual GCSE data, most felt that they did so which is reassuring considering that the majority of young people believe that GCSE's is one of the most heavily weighted parts of the application process.

Do you feel as though the universities take adequate consideration of the relevant contextual factors that may have affected your GCSE results?
42 responses
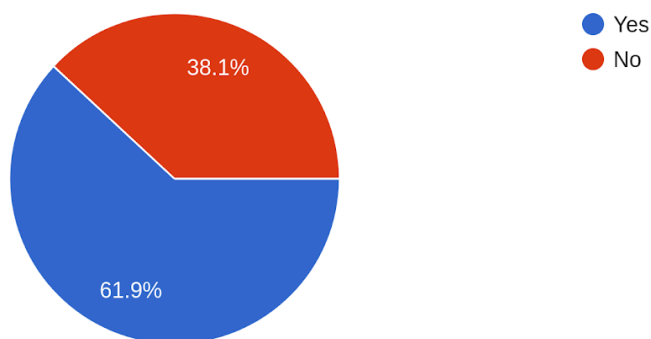
Now analysing the responses from BAME young people, we see that lack of diversity and perception of social class are the two largest issues discouraging this demographic of young people from applying. It was somewhat reassuring to see, however, that 'None of these' was the third most chosen response (but admittedly only a quarter of all responses). This shows that there is room for programmes to do more work with BAME representatives that are already studying at Oxbridge, who could outline their experiences and ease young people's concerns about lack of diversity.

Which of these, if any, have drawn you away from your application to Oxbridge, particularly over other universities?
39 responses
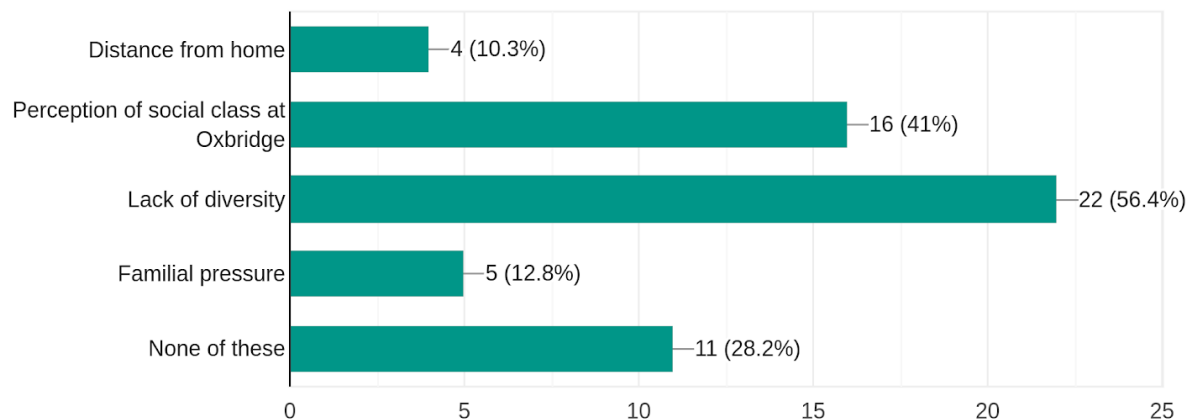
We can see below that slightly over half of the young people are receiving support for these concerns, which means that there is a significant proportion of these people who still are in need of support in easing their concerns noted above.

Are you receiving any support for these concerns?
37 responses

- Yes
- No

43.2%

56.8%
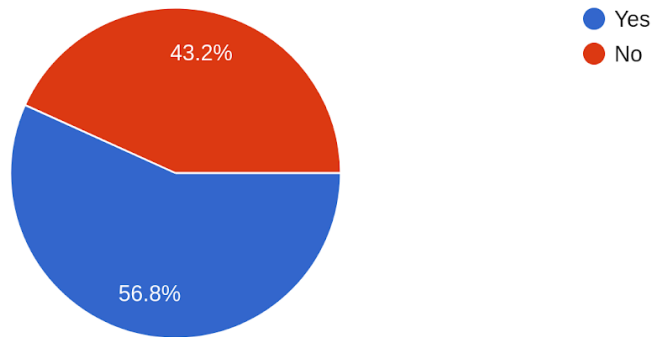
Analysing the data below, we can see that largely these young people seemed to be making the subject decisions based on what they want to study, as opposed to applying to courses due to familial pressure; which was a concern raised during research particularly for BAME young people. 55% of young people indicated that their choice of subject was influenced by the career opportunities that the subject offered which is something that our prior research also highlighted; so it seems as though the 'pick a subject day' provision from OxFizz is useful and can make students aware of the vast career options that every degree offers.

What factors have influenced your decision of subject choice?
40 responses

Factor	Value
My passion and interest in the subject	34 (85%)
The career opportunities that the subje…	22 (55%)
Familial pressure	4 (10%)
How competitive entrance to the course …	1 (2.5%)
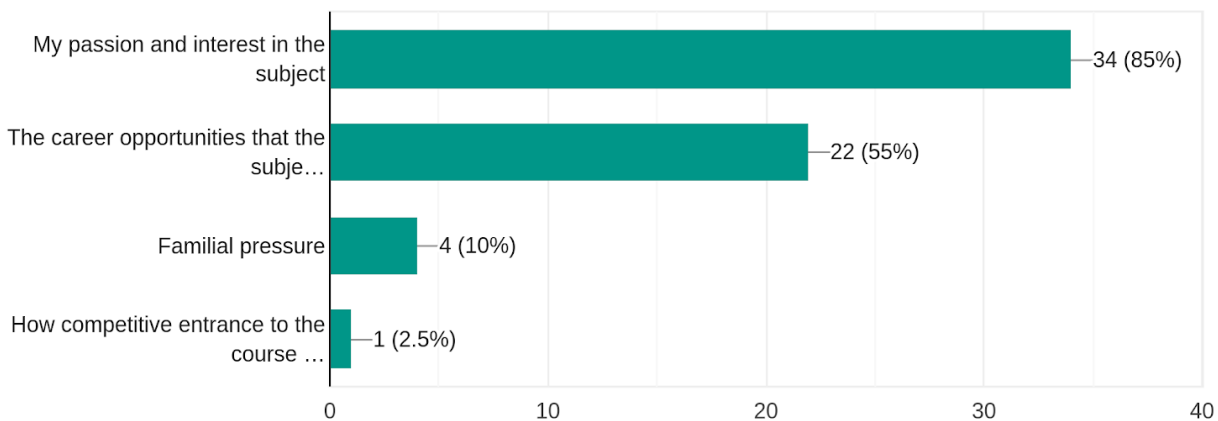
Finally, young people were asked whether they had any concerns regarding the post-offer period, it was good to see that the majority of young people did not have concerns at all. Out of those who did identity concerns, the largest concerns were around obtaining their offer grades, with the second most pressing issue (which, to note, was mentioned half as much) was regarding moving and adjusting to a new location. For a quarter of the respondents, fitting in and the culture of Oxbridge presented a concern that they wanted support with and roughly the same proportion of young people requested support with motivation as well. This slightly contrasts the previous findings which displayed that young people were quite motivated throughout the application process but this may reflect the sudden lack of post offer support that disadvantaged young people face after experiencing substantial support during the application period.

Do you have any concerns regarding what to do after you potentially receive an offer?
42 responses
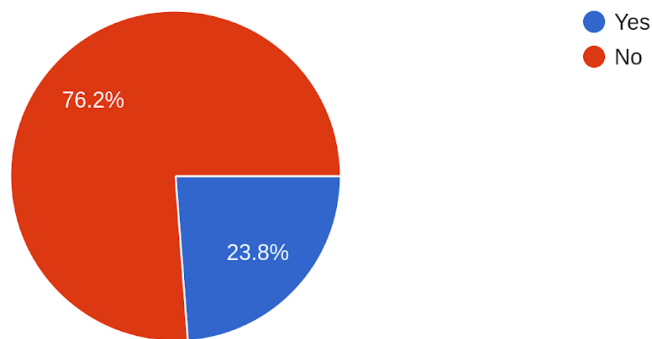
What aspects of the post offer period do you feel you need support with?
41 responses

Section 4

Knowledge, skills and behaviours: Interviews

8 interviews were conducted (each around 30 minutes long) with teachers, widening participation organisation representatives, and university representatives. Interviewees were asked to consider 5 key questions beforehand:
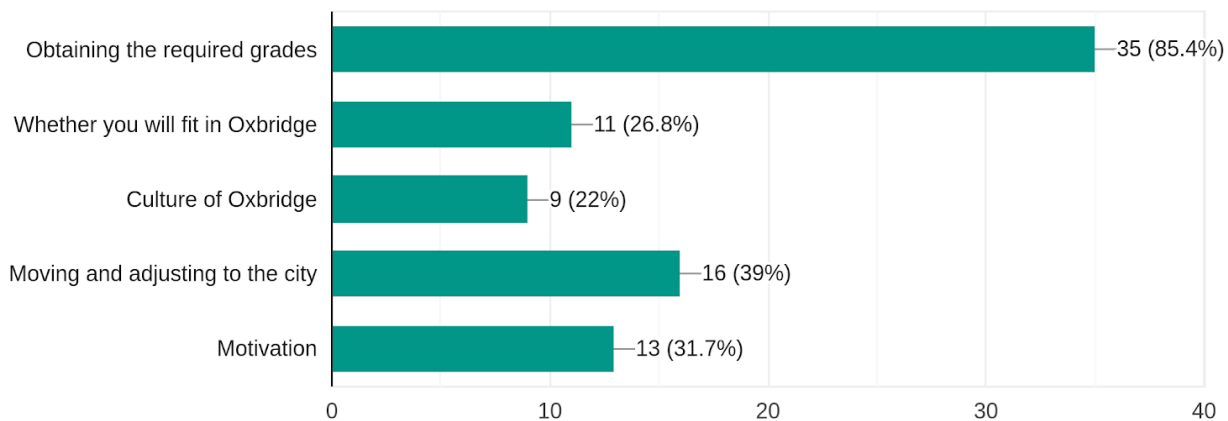
1. What specific challenges do educationally disadvantaged young people face in seeking to secure places at Oxbridge?

2. What knowledge, skills and mindsets do you believe these young people require to maximise their chances of getting into Oxbridge?

3. What existing support are you providing to help young people to improve their chances of securing places?

4. Are there any significant gaps in existing provision for disadvantaged young people that need filling?

5. Given the diversity of provision and providers across the system, how can providers best ensure all young people are able to access the right support at the right time?

In this section we discuss our findings from our interviews, in particular the themes and messages which seem to be echoed by several of our sources.

Skills needed & challenges faced

Asking questions on the specific challenges faced by young people allowed us to gain valuable insight around what providers' views were. One of the most-discussed issues raised was the lack of structural support this demographic of young people faces in comparison with some of their peers. Every interviewee brought this up (to varying degrees), with almost all of them discussing it as one of the key aspects potentially explaining the gap between these young people and some of their peers.

In particular, schools' and organisations' lack of funding, time and even at points expertise was brought up. John Rubinstein of Woodhouse College described the issue succinctly, discussing it in the wider context of a lack of consistent support:

"Probably every school has teachers that have the skills, but they don't have the time; maybe if all teachers had the skills they could help, but only some teachers have the skills - and they don't have the time."

When mentioned at all, all the sources were in agreement that these young people are disadvantaged greatly by a lack of regular, structured engagement with different aspects of the application process - be it through entrance exam preparation, mock interviews (surprisingly brought up by one source as an area where there still needs to be more work done, despite recognising the amount of support already available to young people), or through simple discussion sessions. Comparing against private schools, who were seen to have much more frequent Oxbridge support, the state schools and environments these disadvantaged young people find themselves in are rarely able to offer any support at all - much less weekly sessions. This issue carries over to access organisations as well; and just approaching the problem at face value, the reasoning behind the concern seems to make sense. What better way to ensure that young people are taking on board advice (and indeed offer *more* advice itself) than by having repeated contact on the issues they find difficult?

Yet another concern discussed was a lack of wider engagement around their chosen subject - *supercurricular engagement* as dubbed by Oxbridge themselves. This particular concern was highlighted in several manners - perhaps elucidated best by a source discussing how the envioronments these young people often grow up and are educated in do not press the young people far beyond the A level syllabus. As Michael Slavinsky of Oasis Academy Southbank elucidated, "*[We] need to create spaces for young people to articulate and talk through their subject specific reasoning*". Drawing from another source, we see how this can perhaps lead to misconceptions entirely around what is expected of them either at the interview or entrance exam.

An interesting challenge in place perhaps not just for young people, but also for 'significant others' is the lack of information on what support is actually out there. Brought up by several sources once again, this issue ties somewhat into the concerns regarding the time and resources which schools lack. It may simply be too large of an ask for applicants and those around them to go hunt out each and every avenue of support available to them, particularly when a lot of it is very geographically restricted (an observation raised by an interviewee).

An issue raised repeatedly (and indeed backed up by secondary research) was that of the mindsets, or views, of young people. Brought up as one of the greatest concern by 3 interviewees, and discussed at great length by 2 of those, this issue clearly presents some cause for further study. Those 2 sources both mentioned how there was a lack of motivation - or perhaps appropriate mindsets - in young people often as a result of not having others within similar situations around them. One of these mindsets was described as being an almost 'gung-ho' outlook towards applications - which while desirable in *some* regards, also meant perhaps a certain level of unpreparedness.

Another such mindset (and discussed by different sources) was a more general lack of what one source describe as "*self-efficacy*" - the drive to push beyond the barriers in place to a sometimes extraordinary degree. While unfortunate - it is often the case that these young people will be incredibly disadvantaged due to circumstances beyond their control and in effect providers must demand extra effort from them. These young people might often be the only ones within their schools applying to Oxbridge, and might even be the first in their families to (potentially) go to university as well; this just further exacerbates the issues surrounding engagement. It is important, as providers, to recognise this issue but also approach this carefully. Young people must not be made to feel discouraged about their chances of attaining an offer, and (as one source put it) there is a fine line between informing them of the barriers they face, and discouraging them altogether.

An idea brought up with regards to this point was the need for soft skills. Communication skills, particularly those around the subject (related to the academic engagement as mentioned before) were brought up repeatedly, with one source mentioning how strong applicants could flounder solely due to communicating poorly at interview. In relation, a lack of engagement with families was discussed. Multiple sources elaborated on how again, this lack of support for the people around these young applicants meant that they were unable to gain the necessary mindsets towards, and attitudes around both the application and their subjects as well. This perhaps applies particularly with the Oxbridge application process and its often "*labyrinthine*" challenges and idiosyncrasies.

This may go some way in explaining the misconceptions our sources often brought up - and indeed our primary research through the questionnaires confirms this, in certain places. Financially, at least, many young people were found to be worried about the cost of attending Oxbridge (perhaps not due to the cost itself, as our research found out, but other factors such as not being able to work). Subject choice (and a lack of information surrounding perhaps the more obscure subjects) was discussed in some detail; this ultimately was thought to lead to a lack of engagement as mentioned above.

Of course, all these issues were exemplified when considering BAME applicants. In particular, the social challenges were found to be particularly great for this subset of young people - often due to conceptions (true or otherwise) around the diversity at Oxbridge, and around being perhaps one of only a few applicants of their background. One source discussed how the various (perhaps at first glance, seperated) issues BAME young people can compound on one another, thereby leading to particularly stressful scenarios in which they may not be able to prepare adequately for the needs of the Oxbridge application proces.

Current support and gaps therein

Several recurring methodologies were identified in the support currently given to young people applying to Oxbridge. Partnerships between schools and universities were highlighted by 2 sources as particularly effective in assisting applicants to Oxbridge, particularly given the wealth of financial and intellectual resources available to the universities compared

to other institutes. This topic is addressed later on - but essentially this allows Oxbridge themselves to have the greatest breadth of support on offer, with schemes such as UNIQ, mentorship programmes associated with colleges, and the like.

This, in turn, also heavily restricts the amount of work that can be done either by schools or access providers. It is worth questioning, we feel (particularly given the responses from our interviews), how much work is being done by whichever organisation. In such a vital sector a misallocation of resources could potentially have far-reaching consequences; playing to one's strengths is key. For OxFizz, particularly, it seems that making use of it's intellectual resources is key.

An interesting point brough up by one source was the need for providers to focus on either depth or breadth of support. Organisations can choose to spread their resources wide and support as many applicants as possible - or they can narrow in on a (relatively) select few. Different providers have differing views on this - but nevertheless it is an interesting point worth considering. Bearing into mind the concerns around consistent support needed - it may be worth looking further particularly into more personalised approaches for a select few schools or areas.

2 sources discussed a lack of support from a younger age - "*as early as year 9*" as described by one of them. They felt that this could not only foster better attitudes around the application, their subjects, and self-preparation, but it could greatly encourage the development of the soft skills mentioned beforehand. An interesting situation in which this may be applied is in bringing out the motivations to apply to Oxbridge at an earlier stage; timing of support was mentioned by 2 different interviewees.

The first was directly related to this point - the source discussed how each year of the application process, there would be a group of applicants who would decide somewhat late into the application process that they want to apply to Oxbridge, and thus have missed out on vital support sessions earlier on (it would be interesting to explore this phenomena further, to see how often it links into missing sessions regarding mythbusting or motivations for applying to Oxbridge).

The second way this was brought up was in a perhaps misplacement of the support given to these young people. The source felt support needed to be provided earlier in order for young people to (more effectively) take on the advice given, and then to reapply it. This links into the greatest concern raised with regards to the current provisioning (and an issue mentioned before) - the lack of consistent support. However, the implications of this advice can be challenging to overcome for providers, given the need to have so much *more* work - starting ideally from a younger age as well.

One method to incorporate such report suggested by several sources through the interviews was to create or encourage peer-level collaborative sessions. Currently, much of the support offered is either individualistic, or in one-off group sessions (where even then, the format is a group of young people being taught by a mentor). Sources stated how by encouraging group collaboration around problems and even just the subject(s) themselves would enable the young people to develop not only confidence and other communication skills, but allow them to further think around their subjects as prompted by the organic discussions which arise in these group environments.

Somewhat related to this, the need for role models was brought up. While many schemes do exist offering this sort of support - almost none are long term enough for there to be significant impact. One source suggested collecting various stories and experiences of people from diverse backgrounds; this would not only enable young people to be informed about potential educational paths (e.g. with more obscure subject areas), but allow for this gap of a mentor role in their life to be somewhat fulfilled.

Another significant gap in the existing support was identified as a lack of assistance post-offer - particularly around tutoring to help achieve grades required to get into Oxbridge. When asked, almost all the sources identified this as the chief concern within this period - and also mentioned how there was a large space to fill as a result.

Some university schemes are tapping into this area - which was brought up by 2 different sources. For Cambridge, in particular, certain students are able to receive a 10 week programme of online tutoring to support them in securing grades in order to meet their offer. This type of support was highlighted as particularly important for those already receiving support from external sources - as if the amount of assistance a young person is receiving suddenly drops off, they may be left to face greater academic difficulties than they would have otherwise.

Resources and organisations targeting significant others (as mentioned before) are also somewhat lacking. Parental intervention was brought up in specific by 2 sources, and of course school intervention was discussed at some length by several others. The form of this intervention is also something worth considering - when it does exist, it is often either very

early on in the application process (e.g. simply describing to parents what Oxbridge means for the future of the applicants), and on top of this in one-off, large sessions. Rarely is there more individual advice given - for example information on what parents should be encouraging young people to do. In schools, the situation is slightly different but still may need worth considering. While Oxbridge guidance may well exist - it is oftentimes in the form of a point of contact running sessions and the like. There may be a need to incorporate such behaviour into a wider programme as part of the school itself - as one source stated had been done in a school they worked with to great success.

Thus, looking at the greater picture (in terms of the challenges faced, and what is being done to address them) - we see there are key areas in which OxFizz is positioned to play a role given their existing resources (namely a pool of highly skilled individuals, as mentioned before). A note brought up before (the lack of signposting) presents an interesting potential avenue to explore further, in particular, with other organisations (particularly given OxFizz's collaborative networks already in place). The other existing gaps in provisioning can be discussed via this collaborative network as well, of course, but it seems as if they are issues perhaps able to be addressed within the existing organisational constraints themselves.
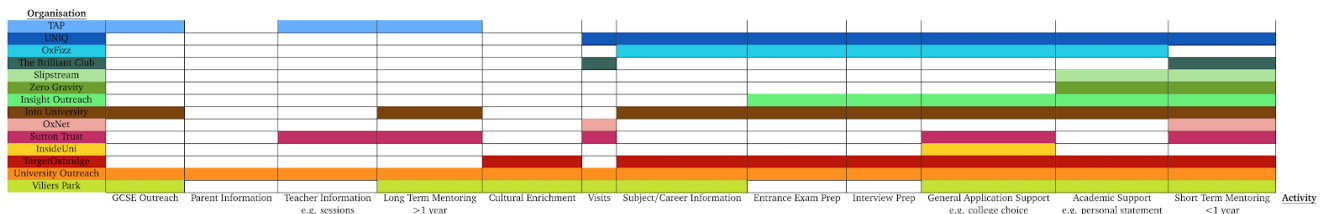
Section 5

Existing Support

Figure 5.1: A graphical representation of activities (see appendix C for a larger version)

Here we can begin to analyse the different organisations within the access sector and see which areas are perhaps lacking in support. Working left to right, we come across:

- GCSE Outreach: Defining this as outreach activities commencing from and throughout Y10/Y11. In the research conducted, a recommendation which came up several times was the idea of long term, consistent support. Looking at the outreach performed during GCSEs we can see that there are not many organisations looking to work during this period of a young person's academic career. This lack of provision appears to be because organisations believe that much of the key support is needed during year 12 or 13. However, there may still be room for provisioning during the GCSE period to enable young people to make more informed A level choices and encourage them to work towards getting the competitive GCSE grades needed to make an Oxbridge application possible.

- Parent Information: There is a lack of targeted parental support with respect to the application processes. While this aspect may not present the most urgent concern, it may be useful to get parents more involved in the application process as they can encourage children and give them consistent monitoring to see if they're on track that schools sometimes cannot provide.

- Teacher Information: There is a lack of dedicated support in place for providing information to teachers specifically. This is an aspect of the process that can be addressed by developing relationships with schools and teachers; for example, OxFizz could share their resources, contacts and knowledge with teachers through school collaborations. OxFizz could explore this in their future strategy planning.

- Long Term Mentoring: Reesearch shows this activity in particular could be effective for young people. However, actually providing this presents much greater effort and financial implications for organisations than perhaps other activities, given the need to maintain effort over a longer period of time.

- Cultural Enrichment: This is something that is not addressed to an extensive degree in the UK. Researching the attitudes in the US has shown that broadening students' super curricular portfolio is something that outreach schemes focus on doing; there may be room for organisations in the UK to do more in this aspect.

- Visits: This is an activity which can help students understand what Oxbridge is like and dispel myths. This may not be an activity for OxFizz to facilitate but it is an aspect of outreach work that has benefits for disadvantaged young people.

- Subject/Career Information to Academic Support: These are activities already covered by OxFizz, and on top of this these activities (as shown) already have a wealth organisations working to support young people.

- Short Term Mentoring: While OxFizz does not actively undertake this activity - as the diagram shows this is perhaps the best covered area in terms of support available for young people.

Another recommendation which is perhaps not explicit is the need for signposting; the information contained in Figure 5.1 shows that while able to be found is not simple enough to do so perhaps for someone completely new to the process and whose school perhaps does not provide adequate information. This point cannot be overstated enough, at least given the current climate within the widening participation sector. For a young person, parent, or school perhaps seeking to provide for its students, the obscurity of certain avenues of support can have far-reaching ramifications. As the playing field stands, many young people are able to luckily access a wide array of support (each hopefully catering to their own strengths), but equally so there may be those who are not aware that certain support networks even exist.

5.1 Other forms of existing support

Oxford and Cambridge have several initiatives to support prospective students from non-traditional background, both prior and after applying. This comes under the bracket of student outreach. For Oxford, UNIQ is the university's own summer school. Students who attended this summer school have commented how teachers did not encourage further education or had teachers with low aspirations[21]. Ffion, named in the aforementioned report, was supported by the Pathways Day and Opportunity Programme, not coming from a background "*conducive to getting people into A Levels*". The Lady Margaret Hall Foundation Year has also been found to be crucial to supporting students upon arrival to Oxford, increasing student confidence in academic ability and essay writing[22]; the *Crankstart Programme* (formerly called the '*Moritz-Heyman' Scholarship*') has also monetarily supported students who were financially anxious before applying[23].

Cambridge's equivalent of UNIQ is the Sutton Trust summer schools, which help students "*develop a clear understanding of the application process so they have the confidence to make a competitive application*" and provide reassurance about 'fitting in' to the university[24]. Target Oxbridge has also done essential work, in particular supporting students from BAME to cover the lack of representation "due to a number of factors, including prior educational disadvantage, a skew towards applying to a relatively narrow range of subjects, and feeling that selective universities are not for them", providing guidance on the application processes.

Cambridge also have a new and innovative programme called the Cambridge Applicant Support Programme which is being offered by the Cambridge admissions office for those applying for Cambridge in 2020. They offer young people who are considering making an application to the University of Cambridge a series of interactive sessions, mentoring and guided independent learning to support them through the application process. Young people on the programme also receive expert admissions support and feedback on each element of the application process. Upon receiving an offer, students gain access to a 10 week programme of online tutoring to support them in securing the grades required to meet their offer. This provision of tutoring support upon receiving an offer appears to be a beneficial aspect of post offer support for disadvantaged students.

Another existing support programme is The Expanding College Opportunities (ECO) Project targeted students from disadvantaged backgrounds with an aim of providing appropriate, tailored information for applying to higher education. "*Indeed, research has shown that more 'hands-on' solutions are typically highly effective in dealing with these issues*"; this project proved far more successful than information simply posted online by UCAS[25].

[21] University of Oxford, *Oxford Outreach: Pathways to Success*.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] University of Cambridge, *Widening Participation: Our commitment to outreach*.

[25] Wyness, *Rules of the game: Disadvantaged students and the university admissions process*.

Section 6

Potential roles to be fulfilled

6.1   Study of American Universities

We conducted research on a few American Ivy league universities in order to compare their diversity initiatives to those that we have here in the UK. Harvard have an Undergraduate Minority Recruitment Programme that is staffed by current undergraduates and they help students learn more about the application process and life as an undergraduate student[26]. One benefit of this is that all of the staff for this programme are ethnic minority themselves and so they are relatable to the students and perhaps can better understand their specific disadvantages. OxFizz could try and diversify their volunteers more through more outreach schemes to find ethnic minority volunteers and this may improve outcomes with young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Harvard also has a really comprehensive application tips page which explains in good detail what each part of the application process is used for[27].For example, they explain in depth what they use the information about extra-curricular activities and work experience for; they do the same for the personal essay section which is the parallel to our personal statement. Oxbridge does not have this, having this transparency could make the application experience less daunting for disadvantaged young people. With the data collected from our questionnaires and interviews, OxFizz could create a one/two page tips document to give to young people on OxFizz's programme.

Through researching Princeton and Yale we found that the American concept of outreach differs from the UK's, it appears to involve community work more than a focus on higher educational matters. For example, one of the holiday outreach initiatives for Princeton University is '*One Simple Wish*', which was "*founded by a foster/adoptive parent who wanted to empower more people to support children who've been victims of abuse, neglect and abandonment in very simple yet meaningful ways*". This focus on community work could be partially fostered in the UK which would have disadvantaged young people build up their extracurricular portfolio.

A similarity found across all the American universities that we researched is that they offer a longer period of support; their summer schools are typically 7 weeks long as opposed to one week here in the UK. Whilst we may not be able to model an identical programme here in the UK, the theme of consistent and long term support could be adopted to enhance the benefit that disadvantaged young people receive from access programmes.

More generally, with regards to widening participation, some universities in the US have adopted a different approach (as mentioned before), seeking to ensure their cohorts are culturally and racially diverse. They have done this through tailoring their yearly intake's demographics as to ensure a diverse body enters the university each year - stating that this helps improve grades and student experiences. This has been argued in the US Supreme Court to produce greater academic attainment in disadvantaged applicants[28], provided of course that applicants are able to get a place within the institutes. However, it is noteworthy that this methodology is hotly debated - largely out of concerns regarding discrimination. (See Appendix B for some more detail on schemes offered by Princeton and Yale.)

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[26]Boliver, "Exploring Ethnic Inequalities in Admission to Russell Group Universities".
[27]Harvard University, *Application Tips*.
[28]Gratz v. Bollinger et al., *539 U.S. 244*.

6.2 Findings and Recommendations

Overall, there were several key areas which seemed to be brought up by our questionnaires, interviews, and secondary research. On a broader view, there is a need to tackle the more systemic barriers that young people face, with regards to diversity and socio-economic factors (in which case it may well be worth considering models similar to those that are operating within the US). This would present financial issues if emulated on a wide scale, but it may be potentially worth modelling the US in a small-scale manner or encouraging larger institutes such as the universities themselves to take on the task.

With regards to specific insights that we gained from our research, the single greatest takeaway is the need for longer terms, consistent support throughout and crucially after the application process - in order to develop not only the academic but soft skills needed at interview, which is an area in which young people struggle.

It may be possible to achieve better outcomes with young people on access programmes by engaging with young people on a one-to-one basis, rather than simply just posting up information. This hands-on experience could include similar preparation to that which advantaged young people get, such as interview practice as well as advice with writing personal statements. This is particularly relevant given the concerns found in the questionnaires. Appendix A provides some personal stories as to the extent which this support was lacking in their progression to Oxford, establishing the importance of support with the application process.

The idea of peer collaboration with other young people appeared several times in our findings, this would facilitate the development of appropriate mindsets which would enable young people to engage with their subjects in ways which could benefit them at interviews. This peer collaboration can occur through discussion groups, online tutorials, or via other means. It is also important to note that these longer-term sessions could be based around whichever aspect of the application process is relevant at that current stage, for example working on entrance exams and collaboratively discussing responses. It could also address some of the concerns associated with BAME applicants - in feeling like they are somewhat isolated in their applications.

While this may initially seem to be something already done - the key issue lies both in the sparsity of the support (currently provided only one off events throughout the year) and also the rather specific nature of these events. Currently students attend events and seminars that are centred on focusing on specific parts of the application process i.e. the interview or personal statement section, but our research shows that young people may benefit from more general discussion groups about their academic interests; this will enhance their ability to speak about material outside of their curriculum (which is a skill needed during the interview).

Another way in which OxFizz may be best equipped to support young people is by creating resources to help deal with the lack of time on school's part - another issue which was raised frequently. This may be by providing resources on revision skills or extra-curricular activities. In addition, it would be useful to formulate certain resources for teachers and other figures who are consistently in the young peoples' academic lives. This could, hopefully, alleviate some of the workload concerns that schools face and the lack of time teachers have available to spend catering to Oxbridge applicants. Furthermore, another way in which teachers lack of availability can be addressed is by utilising the volunteer networks available to OxFizz to run dedicated after-school sessions and the like, going over aspects such as subject choice, general application guidance, and interview advice (ideally as frequently as possible) so that young people can become better equipped to make successful applications. This guidance from volunteers can provide disadvantaged young people the role models that may lack, according to many of our sources.

In addition, our research indicated that there is a lack of information on the support resources available - i.e. schools struggle with knowing what to access and where to access it from. Given OxFizz's collaborative network, this may be an avenue which they would like to explore further. Putting this signposting into effect, however, may be a challenge given the potential costs associated with it. This may be an area where the universities themselves need to be pressured to better advertise the access support schemes that schools can access (perhaps in a similar way to that in which external scholarships are advertised).

Lastly, a recurring issue which came up was to do with misconceptions surrounding Oxbridge - with regards to culture, finance, or other ideas (such as the nature of academic work). These misconceptions can be dispelled in the form of simple talks or workshops, but perhaps (as one source mentioned) collecting volunteer stories and holding discussions would be the best way to go about this. This could be helpful with the myths around subject choice as well, or around interviews.

Appendix A

Personal Stories

Catherine Dove, French and Spanish, Current Student

When I came to interview I had already been told in a practice interview with a local private school scheme that I was unlikely to get in; a practice interview with my headteacher had gone very badly (how on earth do you answer "*why do you want to study at Oxford*"?) and I was applying to a literature course with a C at AS English Literature because my state school English department had taught us the wrong course for the exam, resulting in an E in my exam. Needless to say I felt very out of place, despite being a white middle class student from a supportive family background. I can't imagine how alienated I would have felt without those privileges. In the end, my interview experience was nothing like my practice interviews. I was never asked "*why do you want to study...*" or anything as general as that. My tutors were only interested in what I had to say about specific texts and how I responded to unknown content. Many state schools simply do not have the right information to inform students applying to Oxbridge. The pre-interview experience convinced me that Oxford would make me feel out of place and alienated, which did not match my actual experience of studying at Oxford at all.

Nobel Basser, Engineering Science, 2016-2020

1. A lack of Parents that went to Oxbridge / uni - parents that know about the process/can increase aspirations and ambitions. Parents to encourage their kids to apply to Oxbridge and set them up for it etc.

2. A lack of dinner table discussions. Very beneficial - critical thinking, debating, being well read, knowledge about real world situations. Formulating opinions and arguments and then adjusting as new points are made

3. Lack of family - no family to help get work experience or went to Oxbridge etc.

4. Schooling - people that went to your school that are at Oxbridge to provide advice or even just to see that people like you make it

5. Socioeconomic background - the people around you. If the people around you are more interested in trying to make it as a footballer, you won't be as intellectually challenged etc. Ambitious people drive those around them. There's a lack of that in a low socioeconomic background. There's a saying - if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room. That means I spent my 14 years in pre-uni education in the wrong fucking room. Smart drives smart, lack of ambition encourages a lack of ambition

6. Lack Teacher encouragement. Big lack of that - for some it's active discouragement even, which means people aren't gonna back themselves

7. Distance. Oxford is pretty far south - what about those kids in Cumbria etc. Can they afford to come all the way down just for an open day or when moving in? It's a long way for kids in the north that may prefer to go closer to home

8. Parents that drive. It's difficult moving in on public transport – I myself take 3 trips to move my stuff in (partly due to the requirement of bedding)

    And so some people may prefer to go to uni near them since they can live at home

9. Finances - Linked to socioeconomic background. Moving out costs money, and yes the bursary system is generous but that and the maintenance loan are really only sufficient for those with family incomes under around 30k - add a few siblings to the mix and we're talking big money

Madeleine Davies-Brown, German and Linguistics, 2016-2020

I was lucky that I went to a good state school and state college, but none of my teachers had been to Oxbridge or experienced the interview process. Being up North, there seemed to be less awareness about what it takes and who would fit in. While teachers supported my ambition, I received a lot of ill-informed advice about making sure I'd done my Duke of Edinburgh and had lots of hobbies to talk about in the interviews! In the end it came down to honing my interests within my subject and making sure I could talk in detail about the literature I enjoyed. When you find an author or genre you enjoy, it's much less intimidating to do your thorough prep. I worked with my A Level German teacher on some grammar practice for the admissions and pre-interview tests, as we hadn't yet covered the test material in class. I scored quite terribly for this reason but still got a place!

Charlie Hailes, Classics, 2016-2020

I was daunted by the interview process- or, rather, what I expected the interview process to be. My teachers suspected that I would be asked questions such as "*Why do you want to study Classics?*"; "*Why do you want to study at Oxford?*"- i.e. like a job interview. When I went to my first interview, I was given a poem and asked to comment on it. In another, I was given a picture to comment on. I was also asked what I make of Tacitus' historical accounts. It was like being in some sort of class, not anything which I could prepare. My school really didn't know anything about it; after all, I am their only ex-student in Oxford, and I know of no-one else, at least since I have been old enough to remember, from that school to have got into Oxford. For me, though, the interview process was not actually the biggest issue. The other parts of the process were far more tricky; the interview itself was just to see how I think, to check my potential, it wasn't a test of what I know or why I want to study. Nor did the challenge stop after my offer; it is daunting arriving here, knowing no one else but witnessing the privilege around you (perhaps worsened by my subject choice!).

Appendix B

US University Outreach: A look at Princeton and Yale

Princeton and Yale are two of the most prestigious universities in the USA, both with a commitment to 'outreach'; however, the American concept of outreach appears to involve community work more than a focus on higher educational matters. For example, one of the holiday outreach initiatives for Princeton University is 'One Simple Wish', which was "*founded by a foster/adoptive parent who wanted to empower more people to support children who've been victims of abuse, neglect and abandonment in very simple yet meaningful ways*". Some do focus on educational matters, however, such as the *Princeton Young Achievers programme* which "*provides homework/enrichment help to children from lower income neighbourhoods*". There is also the *Community College Faculty Program (CCFP)*, "*an opportunity for New Jersey community college faculty members and administrators to undertake advanced study*"[29].

There are also programmes which deal directly with access to the university. The *Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (LEDA)* and *Freshman Scholars Institute* summer schools provide seven week on-campus opportunities for academic study and development. The Office of Admission has contacts with "*community-based organizations (CBOs) around the country that serve high school students from low-income backgrounds; arranging visits to more CBOs, as well as electronic information sessions that target students served by CBOs*" whilst also sending out brochures and letters which "*highlight the University's financial aid program, diverse community, high graduation rate and academic support for students*" with the Office of Financial Aid offering "*some admission information sessions nationwide to answer questions from prospective students and their families about Princeton's generous financial aid program*"[30].

Yale has similar 'outreach' programmes for New Haven students, with specific schools for nursing, music and drama, which includes mentoring and education workshops for students and teachers in the public schools (i.e. the American equivalent of the state sector in the UK). The Yale School of Nursing particularly plays a "*role in improving the health of our local community, especially among the community's most vulnerable populations*"[31].

Yale also has initiatives specific to study at its university. Its 'Pathway' both for Science and the Arts offers "*an opportunity for high school students to experience a collegiate academic setting and earn credits which may then be transferred to the college of their choice following high school graduation*". The university has *Public Schools Partnership*, one of which (*Dwight Hall*) has "*more than 90 student-managed groups that engage Yale University students in contributing more than 150,000 hours of direct service each year, in tutoring, mentoring, youth development, and advocacy*"[32].

For these two universities, it can be seen that the term 'outreach' covers a much broader scope, seemingly to some benefit. A concern for greater community and making information accessible is at the heart of these initiatives, as well as a longer period of support (as opposed to just a one week summer school or one talk in a school). The work for the wider community is interesting to note, as this could help with the public image of the institution. Also important to note is the wide ranging contacts and more national efforts, as opposed to just local schemes; the impact seems to be felt much more widely.

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[29] Princeton University, *Community and Regional Affairs*.

[30] Aronson, "Princeton launches new initiatives to increase socioeconomic diversity".

[31] Yale University, *Office of New Haven Affairs*.

[32] Yale University, *Public Schools & Youth*.

Appendix C

Organisations within the Access Sector

Organisation

Organisation	GCSE Outreach	Parent Information	Teacher Information e.g. sessions	Long Term Mentoring >1 year	Cultural Enrichment	Visits	Subject/Career Information	Entrance Exam Prep	Interview Prep	General Application Support e.g. college choice	Academic Support e.g. personal statement	Short Term Mentoring <1 year
TAP												
UNIQ												
OxFizz												
The Brilliant Club												
Slipstream												
Zero Gravity												
Insight Outreach												
Into University												
OxNet												
Sutton Trust												
InsideUni												
TargetOxbridge												
University Outreach												
Villiers Park												

Activity

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