



University Admissions by Individual Schools

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In an increasingly competitive world it is becoming more important to make full use of the talents of all our young people by ensuring that the brightest and best have the opportunity to reach university. There is a growing demand for a graduate workforce, and a declining number of jobs which require lower level qualifications. Furthermore, if you look at the top people in our society – in the media, politics, law, medicine and business – you find that the vast majority were educated at a small number of elite universities.

So for those of us interested in social mobility it remains a matter for deep concern that, as this report so vividly shows, a young person's chance of reaching one of these highly-selective universities – and particularly Oxbridge – is an order of magnitude higher for those who attend one of a handful of the country's elite fee-paying schools.

Where does this leave the vast majority of children whose families cannot afford a private education? Of course, there are some state schools which do have good records of gaining entry to selective universities, but there are whole swathes which do not and – as other research has shown – students from less privileged backgrounds are much more likely to attend one of these.

What are the reasons underlying this worrying situation? Certainly, those in independent schools generally gain higher grades at A-level than their state-educated peers, and are thus in a better position to apply to selective universities. It is clear that we need to continue to work to raise standards in state schools, particularly those in challenging, inner city contexts.

But attainment is not the whole story. This analysis reinforces the findings of previous research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, supported by the Sutton Trust, which showed that there are many students from non-privileged backgrounds with high exam grades who do not end up at research-led universities. Basically put, a student in a state school is as likely to go on to a leading university as a student from the independent sector who gets two grades lower at A-level.¹

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this is, but it is certainly connected to young people's aspirations and the quality of advice they receive. Many of our independent schools and the highest-performing state schools offer their pupils the sort of tailored preparation and guidance which enables them to make informed and timely decisions which are appropriate to their talents and interests. Those who have the potential to benefit from an Oxbridge education are encouraged and supported to do so, through help picking the right subject choices, to assistance with drafting personal statements and preparing for interviews.

It may also be the case that independent school pupils are more able to demonstrate a deeper and broader understanding of their subject beyond that required to achieve the top exam grades, and are more likely to have studied shortage academic subjects which leading universities tend to value. This is, of course, something to be celebrated and valued, and this report should not be read as being in any way critical of this level of excellence – far from it. Rather, our response must be

¹ 'The Missing 3000' report supported by the Trust found that 45% of independent school students who obtain 26 points (under the UCAS tariff, the equivalent of an A and two Bs) go to a leading university, whereas just 26% of state school students with the same qualifications do.

to develop similar opportunities for all young people in our state education system, so that youngsters are not so disadvantaged by where they happen to go to school.

We must also open-up independent day schools and high-performing state schools to those from less privileged backgrounds. Our Open Access scheme at The Belvedere School in Liverpool, run in partnership with the Girls' Day School Trust, has shown how this can be achieved successfully in the independent sector, and our enrichment scheme at Pate's Grammar School in Cheltenham has highlighted the possibilities within the maintained sector.

But we also need to ask questions about the extent to which universities should be looking for *potential* – alongside prior achievement – amongst applicants. Of course, tutors need to be confident that a student is equipped with the skills and knowledge on which to build further during their studies.

But universities also need to recognise the unevenness of the system from which applicants are drawn. A student who has gained good A-level grades in the face of a challenging school and home environment, but who, perhaps, is not as widely read as his peer from a privileged background, surely has plenty of room to blossom during their undergraduate years? To my mind, universities should be about nurturing and developing talent, not honing a finished product.

Of course, there is no simple solution to the inequalities highlighted in this report. For over a decade the Trust has undertaken a range of projects and research with a focus on these deep-rooted issues, and our summer school programme and other access initiatives have reached tens of thousands of young people. There are more students from state schools, lower social classes and poor neighbourhoods at university today than ten years ago.

Those of us working towards fairer access to leading universities are swimming up stream, and I certainly believe that the situation would be considerably worse had the government and others – including universities – not invested resources in this agenda. In fact, an analysis the Boston Consulting Group recently undertook showed that our access initiatives are excellent value for money: every £1 invested results in a present value benefit of £15 to those who take part.

We would like to thank Lesley Kendall for undertaking the regression analysis and providing statistical advice in general. We are also indebted to the following people for invaluable feedback and comments: Jo Blanden, Mark Corver, Tony Evans, David Gregson, Richard Kemp, Steve Machin, Conor Ryan, Alan Smithers and John Thompson. Finally, we thank also the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and the Department for Children, Schools and Families for providing data.

Peter Lampl

Chairman, Sutton Trust

This report documents the extent to which a few highly socially and academically selective schools dominate admissions to the country's leading research universities.

The study also suggests that the differences in the admissions rates to elite universities cannot be attributed solely to the schools' average A-level results, and that other factors are at work – particularly at the most successful schools.

Key findings

Oxbridge admissions

- 100 elite schools – making up under 3% of 3,700 schools with sixth forms and sixth form colleges in the UK – accounted for a third of admissions to Oxbridge during the last five years.
- At the 30 schools with the highest admissions rates to Oxbridge, one quarter of university entrants from the schools went to Cambridge and Oxford universities during the five years.
- The schools with the highest admissions rates are highly socially selective. The 30 schools are composed of 29 independent schools and one grammar. The 100 schools with the highest admission rates to Oxbridge are composed of 78 independent schools, 21 grammar schools, and one comprehensive.
- Overall, the top 200 schools and colleges made up 48% of admissions to Oxbridge during the five years, with 10 per cent of their university entrants going to the two universities. The other 3,500 schools and colleges accounted for the remaining 52% of admissions, with one per cent of their university entrants going to Oxbridge during the period.

Admissions to the 'Sutton Trust universities'²

- 100 elite schools – making up just under 3% of 3,700 schools with sixth forms and sixth form colleges and centres in the UK – accounted for a sixth of admissions to the 13 Sutton Trust universities during the last five years.
- At the 30 schools with the highest admissions rates to the universities, seven in ten of university entrants from the schools went to this group of leading universities.
- Again these schools with the highest admissions rates are highly socially selective. The 30 schools are composed of 28 independent schools, one grammar, and one comprehensive. The 100 schools with the highest admissions rates are composed of 83 independent schools, 16 grammar schools, and one comprehensive.

² The Sutton Trust 13 universities are those ranked the highest in an average of published university league tables. The list comprises: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, London School of Economics, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, University College London, Warwick and York.

- Overall, the top 200 schools and colleges made up 29% of admissions to the universities during the five years, with 49 per cent of their university entrants going to these universities. The other 3,500 schools and colleges accounted for the remaining 71% of admissions, with ten per cent of their university entrants going to one of these universities during the period.

Admissions and A-levels

- The proportion of university entrants going to Oxbridge from the top performing 30 independent schools was nearly twice that of the top performing 30 grammar schools – despite having very similar average A-level scores.
- At the 30 top performing comprehensive schools, only half the expected number of pupils are admitted to the 13 Sutton Trust universities, given the overall relationship between schools' average A-level results and university admissions.
- At the 30 top performing independent schools, a third more pupils are admitted to the 13 Sutton Trust universities than would be expected given the schools' average A-level results.

The challenge

This study raises two central issues for education policy. Firstly, while university admissions are dominated by a small cadre of elite ‘feeder’ schools, what can be done to open up these schools to a broader section of society, so that talented children from all backgrounds have the same opportunities to develop academically? Secondly, what can be done to enable other schools to improve their pupils’ prospects of going to leading research universities – what can they learn from the most successful schools?

Democratising admissions to leading schools is one of the Trust’s central aims. And we continue to argue for the expansion of two flagship projects supported by the Trust over the last few years.

The Open Access scheme at the Belvedere School in Liverpool, run in partnership with the Girls’ Day School Trust, was found to be very successful. Under the scheme all places at this independent day school were open on the basis of merit alone with parents paying a sliding scale of fees according to their means. Not only did the first year of Open Access girls achieve the school’s best ever GCSE results, but Belvedere’s intake reflected the make-up of the local population, with a third on free places.

Promising results have also emerged from an outreach programme funded by the Trust at Pate’s School, a high performing grammar school in Cheltenham – providing academic enrichment and aspiration-raising activities for children in local primary schools serving deprived neighbourhoods. Admissions to Pate’s from the target primary schools have doubled since the scheme started.

Meanwhile, the Trust supports a host of schemes – from early years projects, to out of school support to university summer schools – which aim to raise the attainment and aspirations of pupils throughout the school system. This report suggests that these efforts need to be expanded and bolstered, extending for example support and guidance for pupils during the early stages of their schooling.

The findings of this report make clear that much more needs to be done to support young people from non-privileged backgrounds to gain access to our leading, research-led universities.

This report documents, for the first time we believe, the extent to which a few individual schools supply the majority of students to the country's leading research universities.

The analysis is based on the university admissions figures for 3,700 schools with sixth forms, sixth form colleges, and further education colleges across the UK over the last five years.³ These figures detail numbers of students from each school entering universities as a whole, those entering the Sutton 13 universities, and Oxford and Cambridge universities individually.

We analyse the data by looking at the relative chances of university entrants going to elite academic universities at each school, and also the total number of admissions taken up by the most successful schools at the research led universities.

For English schools, the admissions figures have then been matched with corresponding information on the characteristics of each school including average performance in A-level examinations.

In total, the analysis covers over one million student admissions during the period 2002-2006.

³ 3700 schools with sixth forms and colleges were listed in the UCAS database as having sent UK pupils to UK universities during the five years. This total includes small sixth form centres and independent tutorial colleges.

Focus on research led universities

This analysis focuses on the Sutton Trust 13 universities, a group of leading research institutions whose degree courses generally have the most stringent entry requirements.⁴

The Sutton Trust has particular concerns regarding the social composition of student intakes at these (and other) elite research universities, and particularly at Oxbridge.

A series of surveys by the Trust has shown that graduates from these institutions dominate the professions, particularly at the higher levels.⁵

The expansion of higher education in the UK disproportionately benefited those from high income groups and has been shown to be one of the prime factors behind the country's low social mobility.⁶

The problem is particularly acute for research intensive universities. In 2004-05, one in five young degree entrants to Russell group institutions (20 large leading research universities) were from the four lower class groups – compared with almost 30 per cent of students in universities as a whole, and one in two of the wider population.⁷

The proportion of state school pupils entering leading research universities has stalled in recent years despite increases over the last decade.⁸

A report published by the Sutton Trust revealed that each year there are 3,000 students from state schools with the grades necessary to be among the 30,000 entrants to the Sutton 13, but for whatever reason end up not attending these institutions.⁹

While this report focuses on this group, the Trust recognises the more critical issue of widening participation to the higher education sector as a whole.

⁴ The list comprises: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, London School of Economics, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, University College London, Warwick and York. These universities are those ranked the highest in an average of published university league tables.

⁵ For a summary see 'The educational backgrounds of 500 leading figures' published by the Trust

⁶ See 'Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America', 2005 LSE study funded by the Trust

⁷ Government Performance Indicators, 2004-05

⁸ 'State school admissions to our leading universities', Sutton Trust

⁹ 'The Missing 3000 – State school students under-represented at leading universities', Sutton Trust

Admission hit rates and admissions trends

The measure we use to gauge the relative success of schools and colleges in sending pupils to academic elite universities is the admission rate or ‘hit rate’ over a five year period.

This was calculated for a given school or college by comparing the number of pupils in the last five years that enrolled at the Sutton Trust 13 universities (and Oxford and Cambridge Universities individually) with the numbers of pupils that enrolled at universities overall.

Five year totals for the numbers of students admitted onto degree courses are used to overcome the year on year fluctuations in admissions. This five year ‘hit rate’ is consequently a more robust measure of university admission rates.¹⁰ Schools have then been ranked according to the hit rates.

Overall trends

The charts opposite summarise the average admission hit rates for all schools, and the volume of admissions at the Sutton Trust and Oxbridge universities. What emerges is a school sector characterised by extreme educational inequalities. A small elite cadre of schools feed the country’s two elite universities, dominating admissions at these institutions.

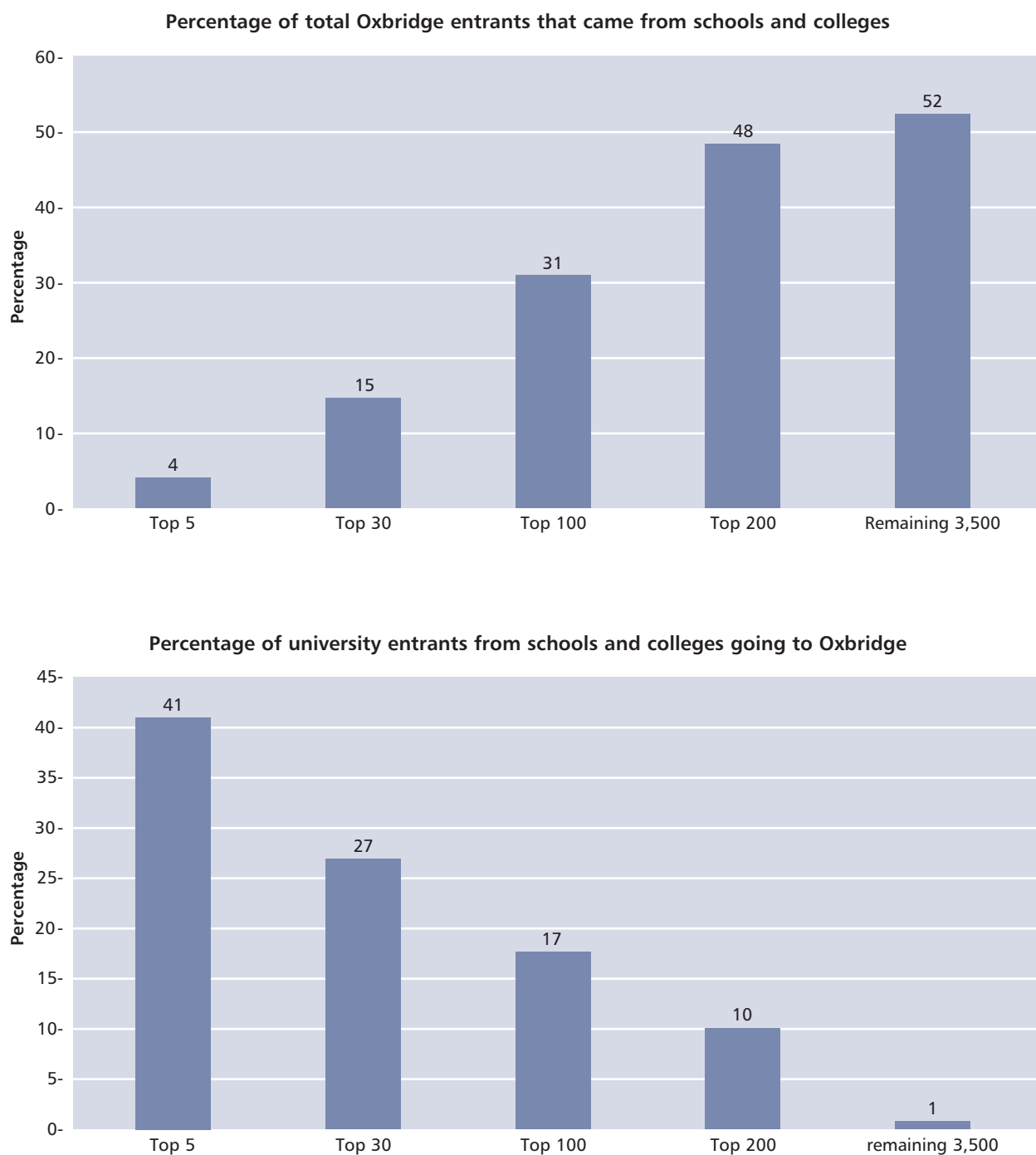
Among the most successful schools the chances of gaining admission to Oxbridge are extremely high. The contrast could not be starker with the vast majority of schools – mainly non-selective state schools – where applications and admission to Oxbridge are the exception not the rule. These schools account for a tiny fraction of total admissions at the universities. Similar trends exist for admissions to the Sutton Trust 13 universities.

These are shown graphically in Figure 1. The first (top) graph shows the proportions of Oxbridge admissions taken up by schools during the five years. This shows that 200 elite feeder schools made up nearly half of all Oxbridge admissions. This means that the other half of undergraduate places at Oxbridge were shared among the country’s remaining 3,500 post-16 schools and colleges.

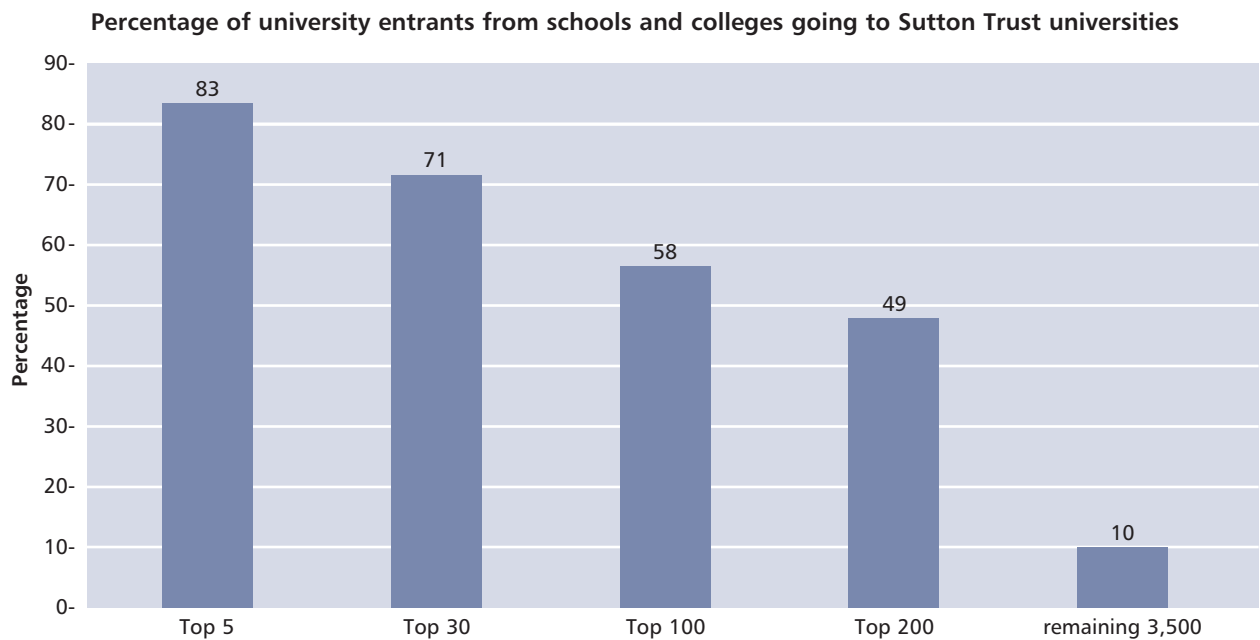
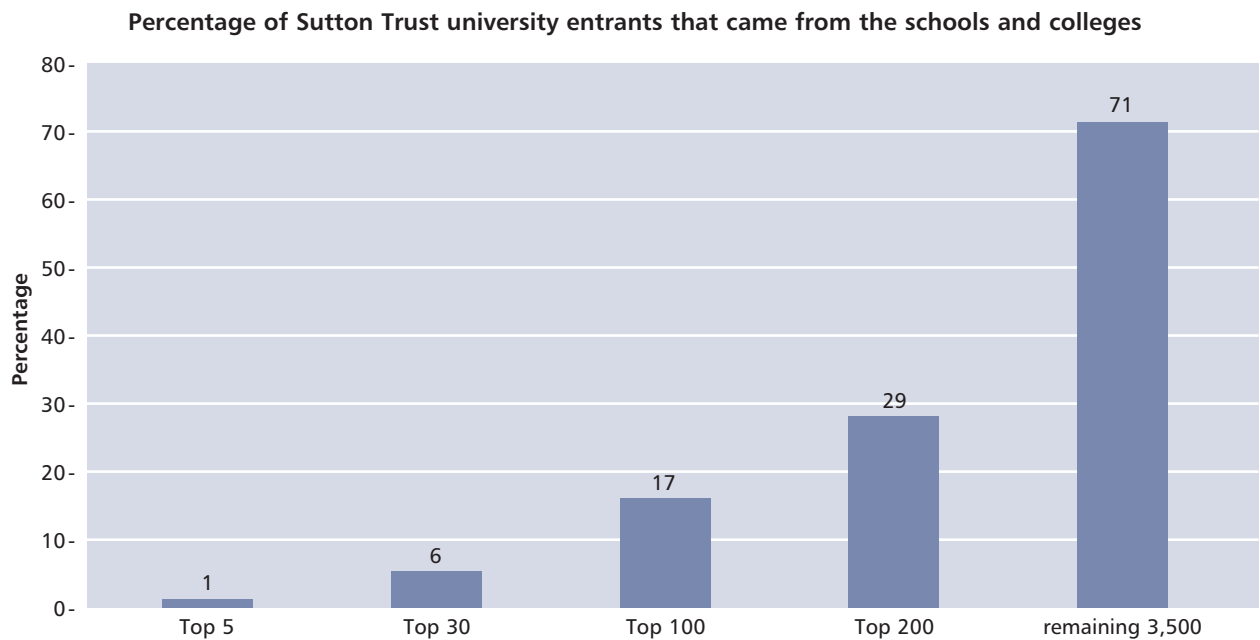
The second graph shows the average Oxbridge hit rates for schools during the last five years. This demonstrates how different admission hit rates are for schools across the sector. As many as four in ten university entrants go to Oxbridge from the most successful schools. This contrasts with an average admission rate of just over one in a hundred university entrants going to Oxbridge for the remaining 3,500 schools.

¹⁰ Although this averaging over five years may mask trends in admission patterns.

Figure 1: Admission rates at leading schools and colleges



Similar, if less extreme, trends exist for admissions to the Sutton Trust universities, shown in the following two graphs.¹¹



¹¹ The Sutton Trust universities admit over 33,000 young entrants each year compared with about 6,000 at Oxbridge, so the concentration of schools in this instance is likely to be less extreme.

Top 100 schools

Which types of schools are the most successful in terms of sending the highest proportions of pupils to leading universities? A series of tables showing the top 100 schools ranked by admission hit rates are presented in Appendix 1 of the report.

Table 1 shows the highest hit rates among schools with at least 100 students admitted to the Sutton Trust 13 universities during the five year period, 2002-06. Heading the table are schools where four fifths of students who went to university enrolled at one of the Sutton Trust 13 universities.

The 100 schools are composed of 83 independent schools, 16 grammar schools, and one faith based comprehensive. They all have at least 40% of pupils enrolling at Sutton Trust 13 universities.

Table 2 meanwhile shows the highest hit rates among schools with at least 20 students admitted to Oxbridge during the five year period. The top 100 is composed of 78 independent schools, 21 grammar schools, and one comprehensive. All have over 10% of pupils enrolling at Oxbridge.

Tables 3 and 4 document the top 100 schools in terms of admissions rates to Oxford and Cambridge individually. One noticeable characteristic of these tables is that while some schools perform well at both universities, many schools have much higher admissions rates at one university than the other.

The figures reveal a group of schools with 50% lower admissions at Oxford compared with Cambridge over the five year period, and another group of schools with 50% lower admissions at Cambridge compared with Oxford.

Proportion of total university admissions

The top 100 schools in each of these tables represent less than 3% of institutions in the post-16 education sector in the UK (made up of schools with sixth forms, sixth form colleges and further education colleges).

Yet the 100 schools with the highest admission hit rates to Sutton Trust universities contributed over a sixth (17%) of all admissions to the universities during the five years. Meanwhile the 100 schools with the highest Oxbridge hit rates contributed just under a third (31%) of all admissions to Oxbridge during the five years. Finally, at Oxford, admissions patterns are at their most extreme. The top 100 schools contributed 35% of all admissions to Oxford during the five year period.

The figures also show that the leading schools have increased their share of Oxbridge admissions in particular over the period. The 30 schools with the highest hit rates to Oxbridge for example saw their share of Oxbridge entrants increase from 13.8% in 2002 to 15.9% in 2006.

State schools

Tables 5 and 6 in the appendix show the 100 top performing state schools in terms of hit rates to the Sutton Trust 13 universities during the five years. These rankings are for schools with at least 100 entrants to the universities during the period.

Among the top 100 for all state schools (table 5), there are a total of 74 grammar schools. Table 6 meanwhile shows the top 100 non-selective state schools. The majority of the top performing schools in this list are faith-based schools. Eight of the top 30 non-selective schools are in Scotland. A number of large sixth form colleges also rank highly in these tables, generating high numbers of university entrants.

Previous research by the Trust has shown that the vast majority of these schools (in England) have low proportions of children on Free School Meals (the standard indicator used to measure the social make-up of pupils in the schools) compared with both local and national levels.¹²

¹² 'Rates of Eligibility for Free School Meals at the Top State Schools', Sutton Trust

University hit rates and average school A-level results

Over-performing and under-performing schools

A key consideration when interpreting these figures is the extent to which these trends are simply a reflection of the high A-level grades of pupils in the elite feeder schools. A statistical analysis of the admissions figures for English schools suggests that the average A-level results for schools – in particular the highest performing schools – do not by themselves explain the whole variation in school hit-rates for elite universities.

The findings indicate that schools with similar average A-level performance vary considerably in the proportions of students admitted to the Sutton Trust 13, and Oxbridge, universities. Crucially, some schools ‘over-perform’ in terms of their hit rates given their average A-level results, while others ‘under-perform’ – sending fewer pupils to elite universities than would be expected given their average academic results.

In other words the school you attend can have a decisive impact on your chances of enrolling at a top academic institution, over and above the average A-level results of pupils at that school.

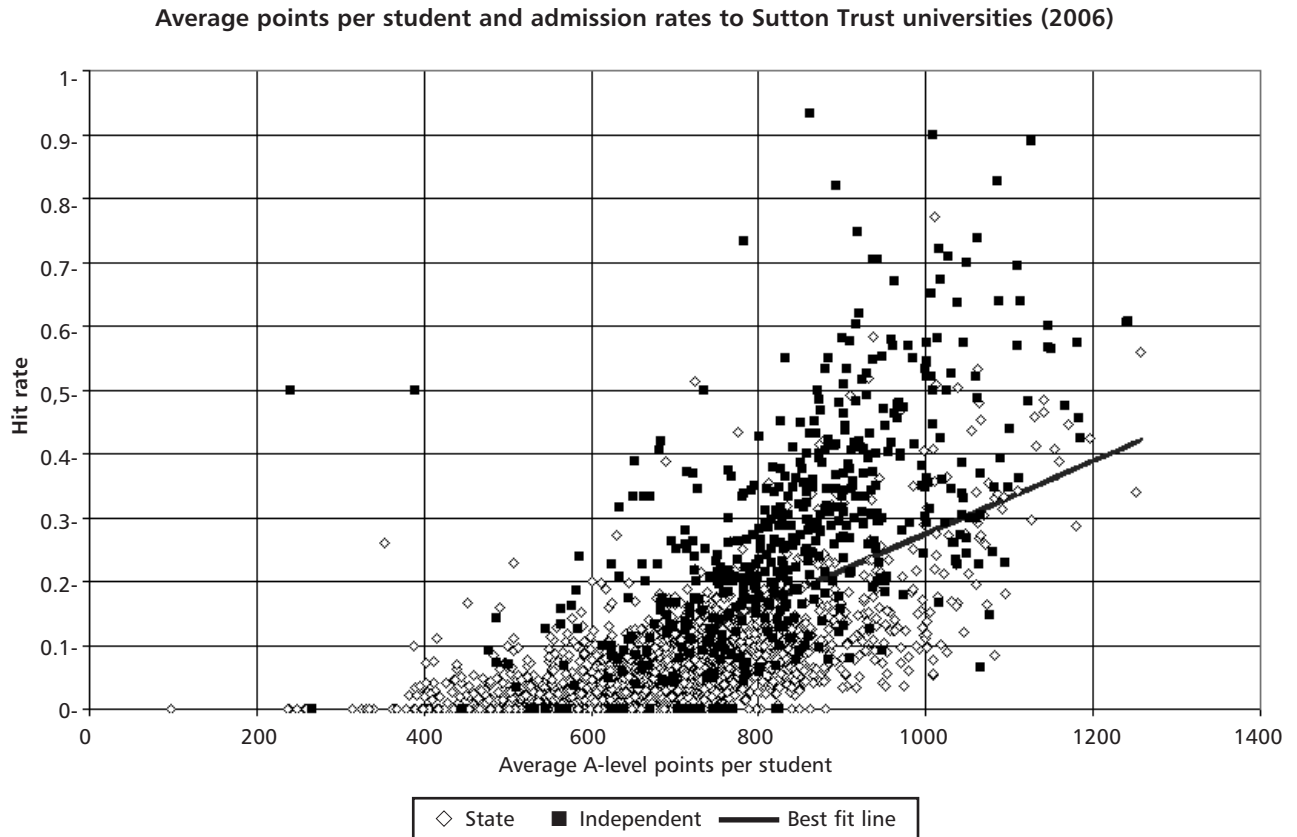
These findings emerge from a statistical regression analysis used to compare average A-level results in English schools in 2006 with absolute hit rates for that year. The absolute hit rates for 2006 were calculated by comparing the numbers of pupils admitted to leading research universities with the total numbers of pupils taking A-levels at the schools.¹³

The results of the analysis for Sutton Trust universities are shown graphically in figure 2. Each point on the graph represents a school. The higher up a school is placed, the higher its hit rate, given its average A-level score. The further to the right a school is placed, the higher average A-level score it has.

The general upward trend of the points highlights the fact that, as one might expect, higher admission hit rates for schools are related to higher average A-level scores. However the vertical scatter of points reveals that some schools or colleges have higher or lower hit rates than those with similar average attainment levels. The average attainment level does not, on its own, explain the variation in hit-rates.

³ Statistically, the average A-level results per pupil at a school accounts for 45% of the variation in the school hit rates for the Sutton Trust 13 universities, and 39% of the variation in the school hit rates for Oxbridge – although these estimates should be treated with caution as there are many statistical caveats to be taken into account.

Figure 2: Admission hit rates for Sutton Trust universities and average A-level scores



Note: under the points tariff for A-levels and other qualifications represented on the bottom axis, an A grade at A-level is worth 270 points, B 240, C 210, D 180 and E 150.

Those schools above the dark line are those 'over-performing' in terms of university admissions, sending more pupils to elite universities than might be expected given their average A-level results. Those schools below the dark line are those 'under-performing', sending fewer pupils to elite universities than might be expected given their average A-level results.

Overall, independent schools (represented in black) not only gain the highest average A-level grades per student but also tend to 'over-perform'. By contrast, comprehensive schools tend to 'under-perform' in this regard, sending fewer pupils to elite universities than might be expected.¹⁴

¹⁴ These findings are supported by the government's Performance Indicators. Prior to 2003, these were calculated on the basis of subject mix and A-level grades and showed that state school admissions to the Sutton 13 and Oxbridge should be three-quarters and two-thirds respectively. Now benchmarks are unrealistically inflated by the inclusion of a range of post-16 qualifications. But the central point remains: the universities are not admitting as many state students as might be expected on A-level grades alone.

Caveats

When considering the question of how it is that average A-level results explain only part of the variation in elite university admission rates for schools, it is important to bear in mind a number of caveats with this analysis.

Firstly, the measure used to reflect A-level performance is an average for the school as a whole. This could conceal different distributions of A-level results among pupils within a school. Knowing the individual A-level scores of pupils is likely to explain to a much greater extent the discrepancies in elite university admission rates.

Secondly, the measure for average A-level results, taken from Government school performance tables, is in fact a measure of a range of qualifications taken by 17 and 18 year olds including A-levels, vocational qualifications and the International Baccalaureate (see appendix 3 for more details). This complication is not an issue for highly academic schools, where A-levels still predominate. However, performance scores for colleges with a vocational bent may be reflecting results in practical as well as academic qualifications. These may be taken by pupils not intending to go to university, or may be given less weight by university admissions officers when selecting students.

Thirdly, the analysis does not take into account the different subjects taken by pupils. Schools may have high average A-level scores, but if pupils are not taking A-levels in essential disciplines required for degree courses in leading research universities, then the university admission rates will be lower for these institutions.

Fourthly, a small number of mature students admitted to the leading research universities will be associated with the average A-level results of previous cohorts of school and college leavers.

Key findings

Despite these important caveats the key findings of this analysis are still extremely telling. They suggest that A-level grades by themselves would not explain university admission rates – even if extra layers of information and sophistication were incorporated into the analysis.

Figures 3 and 4 relate to the differences in admission rates for the very highest performing academic schools in terms of average attainment levels.

Figure 3: A-level results and average admission rates to the Sutton Trust 13 universities from the top 30 performing schools in different school sectors

	Average A-level point score per student*	2006 admissions rate (%)	Expected rate given A-level results (%)	% Points Difference
Independent schools	1112	49.3	33.0	16.3
Grammars	1097	32.7	32.2	0.4
Comprehensives	933	12.3	23.2	-10.9
Sixth form colleges	876	11.4	20.1	-8.6

*An A grade at A-level is worth 270 points, B 240, C 210, D 180 and E 150. The expected rate is based on the overall relationship between average A-level point scores and admission rates for schools and colleges in England.

These again show differences between different types of schools. At the 30 top performing independent schools for example, a third more pupils are admitted to the 13 Sutton Trust universities than would be expected given the schools' average A-level results. At the 30 top performing comprehensive schools, just over half the pupils are admitted to the 13 Sutton Trust universities than would be expected given the schools' average A-level results.

Similar findings emerge when considering the proportion of university entrants going to Oxbridge from the top performing schools.

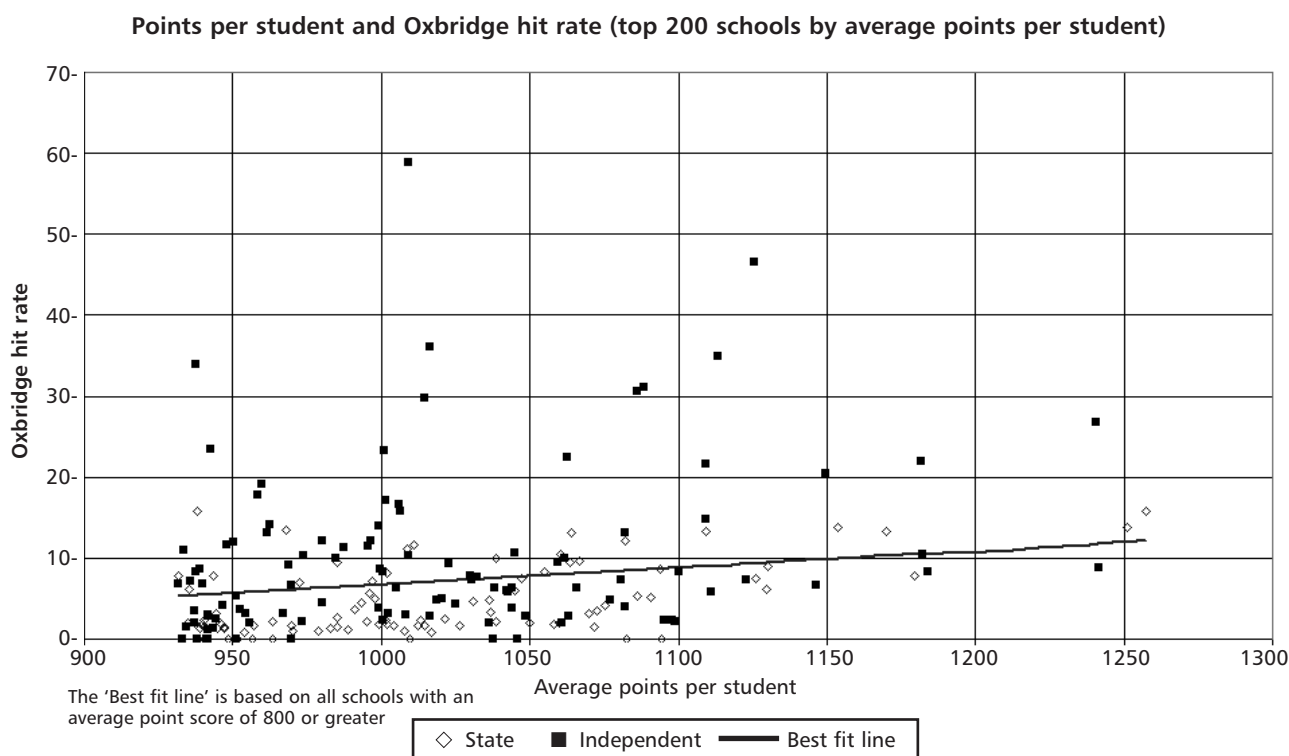
Figure 4: A-level results and average Oxbridge admission rates for top 30 performing schools in different school sectors

	Average A-level point score per student	2006 admissions rate (%)	Expected rate given A-level results (%)	% Points Difference
Independent schools	1112	13.2	10.5	2.7
Grammars	1097	7.5	10.1	-2.6
Comprehensives	933	1.4	4.7	-3.3
Sixth form colleges	876	1.8	4.1	-2.3

The most telling comparison here is between the top performing 30 independent schools and the top performing 30 grammar schools which, crucially, are likely to have similar distributions of A-level scores among pupils taking similar core subjects. The gap between the average A-level score for the top 30 independent schools and the top 30 grammars is a mere 1%, suggesting that, academically, these are students of the same calibre and suitability. However, while 13.2% of

pupils from the independent schools were admitted to Oxbridge, this compares with only 7.5% of pupils from grammar schools.¹⁵

Figure 5: Differences in Oxbridge hit rates for schools with similar average A-level results



Note: under the points tariff for A-levels and other qualifications represented on the bottom axis, an A grade at A-level is worth 270 points, B 240, C 210, D 180 and E 150.

These trends are graphically illustrated in Figure 5. This graph details the absolute Oxbridge hit rates in 2006 for the 200 schools with the highest admissions rates to the two universities. Each point on the graph represents one school. The higher up a school is placed, the higher its hit rate, given its average A-level score. The further to the right a school is placed, the higher average A-level score it has. Schools above the straight line are 'over-performing'; those below are 'under-performing'.

The wide vertical spread of schools for a given point score on the graph's x-axis shows that schools vary considerably in hit rates between schools with similar average point scores. The preponderance of black squares (representing independent schools) at higher positions shows that independent schools tend to have higher hit rates than state schools and colleges with similar point scores.

¹⁵ The same outcome emerges when comparing the top 30 schools in terms of average points per entry (or exam paper), rather than per pupil; the top 30 independent schools have twice the admissions rates for the top 30 grammars with similar average point scores.

Inequalities in admissions

These patterns in university admission rates are mainly a reflection of the extreme disparities in the academic performance of schools in the UK. Universities are limited in what they can do to open their doors to a wider range of schools if the highest-achieving pupils are concentrated in so few institutions.¹⁶ This in itself is a cause for concern: the best performing schools – in terms of A-level grades and elite university admission rates – represent a tiny proportion of the post-16 school sector.

This narrow funnel of entrants is particularly acute for Oxbridge: just under half of admissions at Cambridge and Oxford are generated by 200 schools, with the remaining places spread between another 3,500 schools and colleges.

Is it healthy for the education system to have so few schools supplying the majority of entrants to the academic elite? The support, expectations, and expertise that underpins academic success at these schools is to be celebrated; the problem is that it is only available to a tiny percentage of the school population whose parents can afford it.

These trends also put into context the extremely difficult judgements facing university admissions officials. Two applicants may have the same (predicted) A-level grades on paper, but their school backgrounds may be worlds apart. Who wins the place? The confident, well-read three As candidate from a school where half of pupils end up at Oxbridge, or the candidate who will get three As from a school where they are the first Oxbridge candidate in five years? Both may be academically able, but one has had every opportunity to develop their full potential while the other hasn't.¹⁷

This analysis also confirms that the academic elite feeder schools are reserved almost exclusively for those children from privileged backgrounds. Independent schools – representing just 7% of schools and 15% of A-level candidates – dominate the university rankings. These schools are available to those children whose parents can afford fees. The remaining places are taken up by state schools that are themselves socially selective – either as a consequence of academic selection or by being situated in a middle class area. Those state schools with the highest university admissions rates have low proportions of children on Free School Meals, and low numbers of sixth form pupils claiming Educational Maintenance Allowances.¹⁸

¹⁶ In 2005-06 there were 258,000 16-18 year olds entered for A-levels and 27,500 of these – or 11% – achieved three or more A grades. 36% of the three A grade candidates were from the independent sector.

¹⁷ Interestingly, research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England has concluded that on average pupils from independent schools perform less well in degrees than their state school counterparts with the same A-level grades. However, no difference in degree results was found for pupils with the same A-level grades at state schools with different average A-level results.

¹⁸ The Educational Maintenance Allowance is available to 16, 17 and 18 year olds leaving compulsory education and embarking on learning programmes in England. Young people from households with incomes up to £30,810 can claim a weekly allowance of either £10, £20 or £30 a week; those from homes with less than £20,817 can claim the maximum amount of £30 a week.

We have also found that the success of these schools is not founded on the average academic results of pupils alone. What other factors are at work?

Factors other than A-levels explaining admissions

This analysis prompts two central questions for the Trust.

Firstly, while university admissions are dominated by a small cadre of elite ‘feeder’ schools, what can be done to open up these schools to a broader section of society, so that talented children from all backgrounds have the same opportunities to develop academically?

Secondly, what can be done to enable other schools – particularly those from the non selective state sector – to improve their pupils’ prospects of going to leading research universities?

Democratising admissions to leading schools – by opening up grammar schools and independent day schools – is one of the Trust’s central aims. But this analysis is particularly concerned with the latter question. To consider it, we must assess in more detail the factors – over and above A-level results – that might be driving university admissions patterns.

Breadth of education and support at top schools

One explanation for the admissions trends is the breadth of education provided by the most successful schools that sets their pupils apart from others and which provide additional attributes not necessarily measured by A-levels. Whatever potential the pupils had when they started out at school, attending the school enables them to develop in a way they might not have done if they had attended another school. They may acquire a range of research, writing, critical thinking and presentation skills for example as well as experience of leadership, and team-work.

Furthermore, the culture, resources, and traditions of a school can also have a huge impact on attitudes and aspirations of pupils at a key stage in their lives. These schools offer a variety of practical advantages, from extra help with drafting personal statements, references from teachers who are more attuned to the expectations of admissions officers, encouragement to apply earlier in the applications cycle, and in the quality of written work they may be asked to provide.¹⁹ Stability of teaching staff is also a major factor in a school’s success.

¹⁹ Further discussion of this issue is provided in a research paper by Vikki Boliver, based at University of Oxford’s sociology department.

These factors may partially explain the consistently higher success rates of Oxbridge applicants from independent schools compared with their state school counterparts.²⁰ Are these higher conversion rates simply a reflection of better equipped university candidates from these schools? And if so, can other schools learn lessons from the most successful schools, and improve the prospects of their pupils going to leading research universities?

Aspirations and advice in state schools

Other explanations for the particularly low admission rates among state schools include low aspirations among pupils (even when academically gifted); and poor advice at key stages of their school education.

Research published by the Trust in 2006 revealed that every year approximately 3000 state school students do not gain admission to the Sutton Trust universities – even though they are academically qualified to do so. This ‘missing 3000’ would make up about 10% of the 30,000 undergraduates entering this group of universities each year.²¹

This research suggested that some state school pupils are simply not applying to elite academic institutions even when they have the required A-levels grades, something confirmed by a study by the National Foundation for Education Research for the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. This showed that comprehensive school pupils – all other things being the same – are less likely to apply to Oxbridge than grammar school pupils.²² Unfortunately this research did not look at the application rates for independent school pupils.

Would some students’ prospects be improved if they were judged on their actual and not on their predicted A-level grades? Research has suggested that current attempts to introduce a Post Qualifications Admissions System may offer some benefits to university candidates from lower socio-economic groups.²³

²⁰ The latest figures show that 26% of state school applicants to Oxford are successful compared with 35% of independent school applicants. Similarly, 24% of state school applicants to Cambridge are successful compared with 35% of independent school applicants.

²¹ The report found that a state school pupil needs to get two grades higher in their A-levels than an equivalent pupil in an independent school to stand the same likelihood of attending a Sutton Trust 13 university.

²² Although this difference was less than in a similar study conducted five years earlier.

²³ ‘Estimating the Reliability of Predicted Grades’, UCAS research report. The Government’s consultation on a proposed Post Qualifications Admissions System said that this study indicated that pupils from the lowest socio-economic group are more likely to receive under-estimated predicted grades than students in the highest socio-economic group. These findings however have prompted much debate.

Advice

Universities are also concerned that the quality of advice given to school pupils – covering choice of subjects, future career options, and guidance on higher education – varies dramatically across the school sector. Some schools are able to provide only limited guidance, or guidance which is misinformed, actually limiting the future prospects of pupils it is meant to help.

Increasingly, these concerns relate to the decisions by pupils made as early as age 14. It is at this critical juncture that pupils make choices about academic or vocational routes of study and subjects at GCSE level. These decisions can have unforeseen and far reaching implications for choices at later stages of school and university. Moreover, recent Government reforms in England to introduce 14-19 diplomas could unintentionally create even more of a two tier system between and within schools, divided among vocational and academic lines.²⁴

Teachers of course play a critical role in this process. An NFER survey of teachers and tutors advising applicants on university choices found that more than 80% believed that able students from disadvantaged areas lacked the confidence to apply to Oxbridge and would find it difficult to cope socially. The teachers questioned were themselves operating under considerable misconceptions about the backgrounds of students at Oxford and Cambridge: on average, they thought that less than 40% of pupils at Oxbridge were from state schools; whereas in fact it is over 50%.

²⁴ Creating advisers in each Local Authority, or between a cluster of schools, to provide expert guidance to pupils, and promoting more schemes for independent schools to support state school students in their applications are among the suggestions that have been put forward to the Trust to improve guidance in schools.

Oxbridge issues

There are also specific issues which arise in relation to Cambridge and Oxford universities, both of which invest much time and resources into widening access.

Applying to a college, being interviewed by tutors, filling in an additional form, applying by an earlier deadline, and having to choose between Oxford and Cambridge are all distinguishing features of the Oxbridge admissions process – sending clear messages to pupils that these two universities are different to all others.

In 2001 the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee suggested that the earlier deadlines for applications to Oxbridge – October rather than January – should be scrapped. But the universities have mounted a staunch defence of their selection processes – coupled with some recent reforms to move to more subject-based centralised systems, particularly at Oxford. Interviews are required, it is argued, to distinguish between students who on paper look equally well qualified for a degree place; the earlier applications deadline is required to make time for these interviews; and the special application rule is needed to keep the number of applications down to a manageable number.

But to the outsider not versed in these arrangements, the traditions and subtleties of Oxbridge admissions, and the sheer complexity of the application process, are enough to put any bright teenager off – if they are without support to navigate the system.

Despite moves that will see the admissions process becoming more centralised in the future, the complexities and differences still exist. The coming years will see the introduction of more bespoke subject aptitude tests and ever more details requested about student performance during school, as the two universities strive to distinguish between a widening pool of highly qualified applicants.

There is evidence that misconceptions prevail among potential applicants. Research by NFER has suggested for example that students who were put off from applying to Oxbridge were partly influenced by the mistaken belief that it was more expensive to study at the two institutions – as well as feeling that they would not ‘fit in’.²⁵ These perceptions – whether based in reality or not – remain perhaps Oxbridge’s biggest challenge of all.

²⁵ NFER research on Oxbridge applications

One suggestion is to instigate a high impact marketing campaign which communicates the financial costs and benefits of studying at Oxbridge (and indeed other leading universities). A simple marketing message might help to dispel these myths.²⁶ Others will argue, however, that Oxbridge will continue to deter potential applicants if its admissions process does not become more aligned with mainstream admissions practices for all universities.

It should be added that the two universities, unlike others, make openly available their detailed admissions data. This transparent approach, leading to much greater scrutiny, deserves recognition.

Future research

In truth, there is little in the way of conclusive evidence detailing the part that these factors play in determining the university admission trends described in this report. Among the many key questions are:

- What are the reasons for the different choices made by pupils when deciding which universities to apply to?
- What impact do statements on application forms by pupils and their teachers, as well as predicted A-level grades, have on admissions chances?
- To what extent do admissions decisions reflect the broader knowledge, skills and experiences of pupils but which are not captured by A grades at A-level?
- Is the different and complex admissions process at Oxbridge putting off pupils who would otherwise apply to the universities?

The Trust is currently exploring the possibilities of a survey of pupils with the highest grades at A-level to shed more light on these issues. Looking to the future, more questions arise. What will be the impact of increasing numbers of bespoke admissions tests at universities? Would a US style Scholastic Aptitude Test better identify highly able pupils who are currently not identified by A-levels? And would the SAT distinguish between those pupils with the top A-level grades?²⁷ Will the use of new A* grades at A-level and of AS level module marks in admissions decisions serve to increase diversity or merely to widen inequalities further?

²⁶ Harvard has run a successful campaign stating that any student from a household with an income under \$60,000 will go for free at the university. An evaluation undertaken by the US based National Bureau of Economic Research suggested that this has been successful in recruiting more students from low income homes.

²⁷ The Trust and the Government are currently trialling the SAT in English schools

Meanwhile, what factors are behind the success of those state schools producing many entrants to Oxbridge and other research led universities? With this question in mind, the Trust has commissioned researchers at the Institute of Education to look closely at those relatively few state schools which are consistently successful in sending pupils to research-intensive universities, and explore what lessons can be learnt for the sector as a whole, and particularly for the majority of state schools that have lower Oxbridge admission rates than expected given their average A-level grades.

This analysis has also exposed the paucity of data available on the transition between the school and university sectors. For example, while Oxford and Cambridge universities make admissions figures by schools openly available, no equivalent data is published by other universities. Within the school sector, meanwhile, there is little information on the destinations of pupils from schools without sixth forms. Which schools supply pupils to successful sixth form colleges?

We will also be extending the statistical analysis to ascertain whether schools that do improve exam results over time are able to break into the elite group of feeder schools for leading research universities. We welcome proposals to match the Government's National Pupil Database (which tracks individual school pupils) with statistics for higher education students.

Schools database

As part of this research, the Trust has developed a database of all schools with sixth forms and sixth form colleges in the UK with information on admissions and applications from the schools to UK universities during the last five years.

This data also includes admissions figures for each school and college for entrants to the 13 Sutton Trust universities and Oxford and Cambridge individually. For English schools, these data are matched with information on the schools, including published performance data on examinations.

This database provides an extremely useful targeting tool for the Trust's schemes to support pupils from non-privileged backgrounds. We would also consider any requests to share this data with universities and schools to help inform their own projects.

The challenge

This report documents the continuing challenge facing universities and schools, which during the last decade in particular have made great strides in improving access and in raising attainment standards overall.

A huge effort has been made by the research led universities during the last ten years to open their doors to students from all backgrounds. We believe that without the raft of access initiatives, funded by the Government and the universities, the situation would now be a lot worse. This report merely confirms the need for such schemes.

There is also no doubt that the country's leading academic independent schools are among the best in the world in preparing pupils with the skills and attributes for later life both at university and in the workplace. Standards in state schools meanwhile, faced with different and often extremely challenging circumstances, have also been rising during the last decade – underpinned by increased Government spending on education during the period.

Despite the progress that has undoubtedly been made, the findings of this report make clear that much more needs to be done to support young people from non-privileged backgrounds to gain access to our leading, research-led universities.

We believe that progress needs to be made in these key areas in particular:

- Early interventions – raising aspirations and attainment for younger children, particularly at age 11 and 14.
- Improving advice and guidance – making sure that young people make informed subject choices which are appropriate to their abilities, interests and aspirations.
- Spreading good practice in preparing students for leading universities – helping young people to gain the breadth and depth of skills and knowledge which will lead to successful university applications.
- Shortage subjects – focussing on the sciences, maths, engineering and modern language subject strands.

Guide to tables

The following tables list the top 100 ranked schools in terms of admission hit rates during the five year period 2002-06. All figures listed are based on data supplied by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, and Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

This was calculated for a given school or college by comparing the number of pupils in the last five years that enrolled at the Sutton Trust 13 universities with the numbers of pupils that enrolled at universities overall. Hit rates were also calculated for schools in relation to Oxford and Cambridge Universities combined and individually – again by comparing the number of pupils in the last five years that enrolled at these universities with the numbers of pupils that enrolled at universities overall.

The tables for schools ranked by hit rates to Sutton Trust 13 universities include only those schools with at least 100 pupils enrolled at the universities during the five years. The tables for schools ranked by hit rates to Oxbridge include only those schools with at least 20 pupils enrolled at the universities during the five years. This means that a number of small schools in the analysis are not listed in these tables. Schools with missing or incomplete data are not listed.

The tables also list the total numbers of admissions from schools to Sutton Trust 13, Oxbridge and Oxford and Cambridge universities.

Definitions of schools

The following abbreviations for schools are used in the tables.

IND

Independent school Funding is generated by school fees. Schools can also be selective, admitting pupils on academic ability. Includes boarding schools and day schools.

SEL

State Grammar school Pupils are admitted on the basis of academic tests at age 11

COMP

State comprehensive school with sixth form School admits pupils of all abilities at age 11. Sixth forms can be selective, admitting pupils on academic ability (based on GCSE scores).

SF

Sixth Form College Provide qualifications for pupils over 16. Colleges can be selective

FE

Further Education College

Table 1: Top 100 schools by ST university hit rate

School	School type	Five year hit rate (%)	Five year admissions
Westminster School	IND	85.6	703
St Paul's Girls' School	IND	85.2	391
Winchester College	IND	82.8	529
St Paul's School	IND	80.4	632
North London Collegiate School	IND	76.9	444
Wycombe Abbey School	IND	76.9	269
Eton College	IND	75.7	921
Haberdashers' Aske's School for Boys	IND	71.5	562
Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls	IND	71.1	398
King's College School	IND	70.8	516
South Hampstead High School	IND	69.3	255
St Mary's School, Wiltshire	IND	67.9	129
Perse School for Girls	IND	67.6	175
Cheltenham Ladies' College	IND	67.1	435
Lady Eleanor Holles School	IND	66.7	305
Merchant Taylors' School, Northwood	IND	66.3	409
Oxford High School	IND	66.0	217
Radley College	IND	65.9	379
Manchester Grammar School	IND	65.8	620
Perse School	IND	65.2	294
City of London School for Girls	IND	64.0	235
Charterhouse	IND	63.9	480
University College School	IND	63.8	310
Tonbridge School	IND	63.4	428
St Swithun's School	IND	63.0	177
St Mary's School, Ascot	IND	63.0	148

Withington Girls' School	IND	62.8	228
Magdalen College School	IND	62.6	221
King Edward's School, Birmingham	IND	62.2	357
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	IND	62.2	388
James Allen's Girls' School	IND	62.1	264
Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	SEL	61.8	375
Benenden School	IND	61.7	221
Badminton School	IND	61.7	129
Downe House School	IND	61.6	215
Concord College	IND	61.6	314
Godolphin and Latymer School	IND	61.1	284
City of London School	IND	60.7	377
Sevenoaks School	IND	60.3	575
King Edward VI High School for Girls	IND	60.2	221
Guildford High School	IND	60.1	212
Roedean School	IND	58.2	241
King's School, Canterbury	IND	58.2	417
Harrow School	IND	57.3	393
Abingdon School	IND	56.6	337
Channing School	IND	56.0	126
Immanuel College	IND	55.8	130
Wimbledon High School	IND	55.2	181
Henrietta Barnett School	SEL	54.7	298
Highgate School	IND	54.6	261
Colchester Royal Grammar School	SEL	54.5	293
School of St Helen and St Katharine	IND	53.7	202
Malvern St James	IND	52.8	171
Dulwich College	IND	52.7	475

Headington School	IND	52.6	236
Oundle School	IND	52.5	491
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys	SEL	52.5	241
St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar School	SEL	52.5	349
Reading School	SEL	52.1	309
Tiffin Girls' School	SEL	51.4	310
Putney High School	IND	50.9	161
Tormead School	IND	50.7	136
St Helen's School	IND	50.7	208
St Catherine's School, Guildford	IND	50.7	152
Whitgift School	IND	50.5	331
Lancing College	IND	50.0	222
Malvern College	IND	49.7	255
Manchester High School for Girls	IND	49.5	218
Rugby School	IND	49.4	397
St Leonards-Mayfield School	IND	49.4	115
Hampton School	IND	49.2	351
St Albans High School for Girls	IND	48.5	192
Kingston Grammar School	IND	48.4	163
Fettes College Edinburgh	IND	48.0	202
Latymer School	SEL	47.9	519
John Lyon School	IND	47.8	165
Bedford School	IND	47.7	263
Eltham College	IND	47.3	228
Clifton College	IND	47.3	260
St Albans School	IND	47.1	268
Sherborne School for Girls	IND	47.1	144
Latymer Upper School	IND	46.8	365

Shrewsbury School	IND	46.4	307
Watford Grammar School for Boys	COMP	46.3	348
Nottingham High School	IND	46.3	256
Pate's Grammar School	SEL	46.2	374
Chelmsford County High School for Girls	SEL	46.1	247
Judd School	SEL	46.0	300
Tiffin School	SEL	46.0	338
King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford	SEL	45.8	306
Marlborough College	IND	45.8	386
Royal Grammar School, Newcastle	IND	45.5	341
Maynard School	IND	45.4	114
Woldingham School	IND	45.3	139
Bancrofts School	IND	45.2	238
Kendrick Girls' Grammar School	SEL	44.6	210
St Edward's School, Oxford	IND	44.5	243
Colchester County High School for Girls	SEL	44.5	202
Dr Challoner's Grammar School	SEL	44.4	362
Notting Hill and Ealing High School	IND	44.2	135

Table 2: Top 100 schools by Oxbridge admissions hit rate

School	School type	Five year hit rate (%)	Five year admissions
Westminster School	IND	49.9	410
St Paul's Girls' School	IND	49.0	225
Winchester College	IND	36.0	230
Wycombe Abbey School	IND	35.1	123
St Paul's School	IND	33.0	259
Eton College	IND	32.4	394
North London Collegiate School	IND	30.5	176
Perse School for Girls	IND	29.3	76
Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls	IND	29.3	164
Oxford High School	IND	25.5	84
Perse School	IND	23.5	106
Magdalen College School	IND	23.2	82
Withington Girls' School	IND	22.6	82
Manchester Grammar School	IND	22.4	211
Tonbridge School	IND	21.9	148
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	IND	21.6	135
South Hampstead High School	IND	21.2	78
Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School	IND	21.0	165
King's College School	IND	20.9	152
Lady Eleanor Holles School	IND	20.4	93
Abingdon School	IND	20.3	121
City of London School for Girls	IND	20.2	74
James Allen's Girls' School	IND	19.8	84
School of St Helen and St Katharine	IND	19.7	74
Colchester Royal Grammar School	SEL	19.5	105
King Edward's School, Birmingham	IND	19.3	111

Cheltenham Ladies' College	IND	19.3	125
St Mary's School, Ascot	IND	19.1	45
Sevenoaks School	IND	17.7	169
King Edward VI High School for Girls	IND	17.4	64
Radley College	IND	16.7	96
City of London School	IND	16.6	103
King's School Canterbury	IND	16.3	117
Whitgift School	IND	16.2	106
Reading School	SEL	16.0	95
Charterhouse	IND	16.0	120
Guildford High School	IND	15.9	56
St Swithun's School	IND	15.7	44
King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford	SEL	15.6	104
Chelmsford County High School for Girls	SEL	15.5	83
St Mary's School, Wiltshire	IND	15.3	29
Dulwich College	IND	14.9	134
University College School	IND	14.8	72
Shrewsbury School	IND	14.7	97
Merchant Taylors' School, Northwood	IND	14.4	89
Harrow School	IND	14.1	97
Latymer School	SEL	14.0	152
Maynard School	IND	13.9	35
Newstead Wood School for Girls	SEL	13.9	83
St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar School	SEL	13.8	92
Godolphin and Latymer School	IND	13.8	64
Royal Grammar School, Newcastle	IND	13.6	102
Henrietta Barnett School	SEL	13.6	74
Portsmouth Grammar School	IND	13.5	80

Norwich School	IND	13.5	76
Leeds Girls' High School	IND	13.3	48
Oundle School	IND	13.3	124
Downe House School	IND	13.2	46
Kendrick Girls' Grammar School	SEL	13.0	61
Eltham College	IND	12.9	62
Fettes College, Edinburgh	IND	12.8	54
Judd School	SEL	12.7	83
Dr Challoner's Grammar School	SEL	12.6	103
Tiffin Girls' School	SEL	12.6	76
Headington School	IND	12.2	55
Leeds Grammar School	IND	12.2	73
Forest School, London	IND	12.1	63
Benenden School	IND	12.0	43
Croydon High School for Girls	IND	12.0	44
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys	SEL	11.8	54
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe	SEL	11.7	102
Marlborough College	IND	11.6	98
Highgate School	IND	11.5	55
Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	SEL	11.4	69
Ermysteds Grammar School	SEL	11.3	43
Pate's Grammar School	SEL	11.2	91
St Edward's School, Oxford	IND	11.2	61
King Edward's School Bath	IND	11.2	56
Queen's School, Cheshire	IND	11.0	27
Bradford Grammar School for Boys	IND	11.0	62
King Edward VI School	IND	11.0	59
Loughborough Grammar School	IND	10.9	69

Lancaster Royal Grammar School	SEL	10.8	68
Tiffin School	SEL	10.7	79
Merchiston Castle School	IND	10.7	31
Alleyn's School	IND	10.7	62
Grange School, Northwich	IND	10.7	39
Latymer Upper School	IND	10.6	83
Trinity School	IND	10.6	52
King's High, Warwick	IND	10.6	32
Warwick School	IND	10.6	56
Bristol Grammar School	IND	10.6	75
Bradford Girls' Grammar School	IND	10.6	34
Newcastle Under Lyme School	IND	10.5	33
Rugby School	IND	10.4	84
Malvern College	IND	10.3	53
Colyton Grammar	SEL	10.3	44
Dame Alice Owen's School	COMP	10.2	86
Nottingham High School for Girls	IND	10.1	56
Sutton Grammar School for Boys	SEL	10.1	45

Table 3: top 100 schools at Cambridge by 'hit rate'

School	School type	Five year hit rate (%)	Five year admissions
St Paul's Girls' School	IND	20.0	92
Westminster School	IND	18.5	152
North London Collegiate School	IND	18.4	106
Oxford High School	IND	18.2	60
Wycombe Abbey School	IND	18.0	63
Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls	IND	15.7	88
Winchester College	IND	15.5	99
Colchester County High School for Girls	SEL	14.5	66
St Paul's School	IND	13.7	108
City of London School for Girls	IND	13.6	50
Perse School for Girls	IND	13.1	34
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	IND	12.7	79
Magdalen College School	IND	12.5	44
Perse School for Boys	IND	12.2	55
Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School	IND	11.7	92
School of St Helen & St Katherine	IND	11.4	43
Colchester Royal Grammar School	SEL	11.3	61
King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford	SEL	10.9	73
Tonbridge School	IND	10.2	69
Eton College	IND	9.9	121
Abingdon School	IND	9.9	59
King Edward's School, Birmingham	IND	9.8	56
Guildford High School	IND	9.6	34
King Edward VI High School for Girls	IND	9.5	35
Chelmsford County High School for Girls	SEL	9.5	51
Latymer School	SEL	9.5	103

Cheltenham Ladies' College	IND	9.4	61
Nottingham High School	IND	9.4	52
Dulwich College	IND	9.3	84
Henrietta Barnett School	SEL	9.2	50
St Catherine's School, Guildford	IND	9.0	27
Royal Grammar School, Newcastle	IND	8.9	67
King's School, Canterbury	IND	8.8	63
Withington Girls' School	IND	8.5	31
James Allen's Girls' School	IND	8.5	36
Sevenoaks School	IND	8.4	80
King's College School	IND	8.2	60
South Hampstead High School	IND	8.2	30
Simon Langton School for Boys	SEL	8.1	34
Portsmouth Grammar School	IND	7.8	46
Norwich School	IND	7.6	43
University College School	IND	7.6	37
St Albans High School for Girls	IND	7.6	30
Bootham School	IND	7.5	21
Leeds Grammar School	IND	7.5	45
Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	SEL	7.4	45
Wimbledon High School	IND	7.3	24
Eltham College	IND	7.3	35
Bancrofts School	IND	7.2	38
Lady Eleanor Holles School	IND	7.2	33
Manchester Grammar School	IND	7.2	68
King's School, Chester	IND	7.1	31
St Peter's School, York	IND	7.1	36
Headington School	IND	7.1	32

Abbey College, Cambridge	IND	7.1	21
City of London School	IND	7.1	44
Leeds Girls' High School	IND	6.6	24
Tiffin Girls' School	SEL	6.6	40
Merchant Taylors' School	IND	6.6	28
Norwich High School for Girls	IND	6.6	20
St Olave's Grammar School	SEL	6.5	43
Godolphin and Latymer School	IND	6.5	30
Highgate School	IND	6.3	30
Reading School	SEL	6.2	37
St Edward's School, Oxford	IND	6.2	34
Newstead Wood School for Girls	SEL	6.2	37
Fettes College, Edinburgh	IND	6.2	26
Oundle School	IND	6.0	56
Whitgift School	IND	6.0	39
Methodist College, Belfast	SEL	5.9	68
Loughborough Grammar School	IND	5.8	37
St Albans School	IND	5.8	33
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe	SEL	5.8	50
Downe House School	IND	5.7	20
Shrewsbury School	IND	5.6	37
Watford Grammar School for Boys	COMP	5.6	42
Charterhouse	IND	5.6	42
Sutton Grammar School for Boys	SEL	5.6	25
Wellington School	IND	5.5	25
Bristol Grammar School	IND	5.5	39
Concord College	IND	5.5	28
Altrincham Girls' Grammar School	SEL	5.5	30

Trinity School, Surrey	IND	5.3	26
Kendrick School	SEL	5.3	25
Ermysteds Grammar School	SEL	5.3	20
Leicester Grammar School	IND	5.3	23
Radley College	IND	5.2	30
Nottingham High School for Girls	IND	5.2	29
Stockport Grammar School	IND	5.2	31
Forest School, London	IND	5.2	27
Bolton School Girls' Division	IND	5.2	27
Uppingham School	IND	5.1	38
Malvern College	IND	5.1	26
Christ's Hospital	IND	5.0	27
Tonbridge Grammar	SEL	5.0	34
Dame Alice Owen's School	COMP	5.0	42
Pate's Grammar School	SEL	4.9	40
Judd School	SEL	4.9	32
Royal Grammar School, Worcester	IND	4.9	24
Bradford Grammar School for Boys	IND	4.8	27

Table 4: top 100 schools at Oxford by 'hit rate'

School	School type	Five year hit rate (%)	Five year admissions
Westminster School	IND	31.4	258
St Paul's Girls' School	IND	29.0	133
Eton College	IND	22.4	273
Winchester College	IND	20.5	131
St Paul's School	IND	19.2	151
Wycombe Abbey School	IND	17.1	60
Perse School for Girls	IND	16.2	42
Manchester Grammar School	IND	15.2	143
St Mary's School, Ascot	IND	14.9	35
Withington Girls' School	IND	14.0	51
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe	SEL	13.8	52
Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls	IND	13.6	76
Lady Eleanor Holles School	IND	13.1	60
South Hampstead High School	IND	13.0	48
St Mary's School, Wiltshire	IND	12.6	24
King's College School	IND	12.6	92
North London Collegiate School	IND	12.1	70
Tonbridge School	IND	11.7	79
Radley College	IND	11.5	66
The Perse School	IND	11.3	51
James Allen's Girls' School	IND	11.3	48
Magdalen College School	IND	10.8	38
Merchant Taylors' School, Northwood	IND	10.5	65
Abingdon School	IND	10.4	62
Charterhouse	IND	10.4	78
Whitgift School	IND	10.2	67

St Swithun's School	IND	10.0	28
Harrow School	IND	9.9	68
Cheltenham Ladies' College	IND	9.9	64
Reading School	SEL	9.8	58
King Edward's School, Birmingham	IND	9.6	55
City of London School	IND	9.5	59
Sevenoaks School	IND	9.3	89
Dr Challoner's Grammar School	SEL	9.3	76
Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School	IND	9.3	73
Shrewsbury School	IND	9.1	60
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	IND	9.0	56
Newcastle Under Lyme School	IND	8.9	28
School of St Helen and St Katharine	IND	8.2	31
Colchester Royal Grammar School	SEL	8.2	44
King Edward VI School, Hampshire	IND	8.0	43
King Edward VI High School for Girls	IND	7.9	29
Marlborough College	IND	7.8	66
Judd School	SEL	7.8	51
Newstead Wood School for Girls	SEL	7.7	46
Kendrick Girls' Grammar School	SEL	7.6	36
King's School Canterbury	IND	7.5	54
Downe House School	IND	7.4	26
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	SEL	7.4	47
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys	SEL	7.4	34
King Edward's School Bath	IND	7.4	37
St Olave's & St Saviour's Grammar School	SEL	7.4	49
Godolphin and Latymer School	IND	7.3	34
Oxford High School	IND	7.3	24

Yarm School	IND	7.3	28
Oundle School	IND	7.3	68
Merchiston Castle School	IND	7.3	21
Wells Cathedral School	IND	7.2	21
University College School	IND	7.2	35
St Benedict's School	IND	7.1	23
Benenden School	IND	7.0	25
Bury Grammar School for Girls	IND	7.0	25
King's School, Warwick	IND	7.0	21
Tiffin School	SEL	6.9	51
Latymer Upper School	IND	6.9	54
Forest School, London	IND	6.9	36
Rugby School	IND	6.8	55
Croydon High School for Girls	IND	6.8	25
Lancing College	IND	6.8	30
Alleyn's School	IND	6.7	39
Adams Grammar School	SEL	6.7	36
Fettes College Edinburgh	IND	6.7	28
Leeds Girls' High School	IND	6.6	24
City of London School for Girls	IND	6.5	24
Hampton School	IND	6.5	46
Warwick School	IND	6.4	34
Torquay Grammar	SEL	6.4	39
Colyton Grammar	SEL	6.3	27
Canford School	IND	6.3	35
Pate's Grammar School	SEL	6.3	51
Grange School, Northwick	IND	6.3	23
Guildford High School	IND	6.2	22

Bradford Grammar School for Boys	IND	6.2	35
Ampleforth College	IND	6.1	30
Ermysteds Grammar School	SEL	6.1	23
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe	SEL	6.0	52
Chelmsford County High School for Girls	SEL	6.0	32
Tiffin Girls' School	SEL	6.0	36
Taunton School	IND	6.0	20
Norwich School	IND	5.9	33
Clifton College	IND	5.8	32
Portsmouth Grammar School	IND	5.8	34
Solihull School	IND	5.6	39
Eltham College	IND	5.6	27
Dulwich College	IND	5.5	50
Wolverhampton Girls' High School	SEL	5.5	26
Trinity School	IND	5.3	26
D'Oeverbroeck's College	IND	5.3	23
Malvern College	IND	5.3	27
Hills Road Sixth Form College	SF	5.2	181
Highgate School	IND	5.2	25

Table 5: Top 100 state schools by ST university hit rate

School	School type	Five year hit rate (%)	Five year admissions
Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	SEL	61.8	375
Henrietta Barnett School	SEL	54.7	298
Colchester Royal Grammar School	SEL	54.5	293
King Edward VI Camp Hill Boys' School	SEL	52.5	241
St Olave's Grammar School	SEL	52.5	349
Reading School	SEL	52.1	309
Tiffin Girls' School	SEL	51.4	310
Latymer School	SEL	47.9	519
Watford Grammar School for Boys	COMP	46.3	348
Pate's Grammar School	SEL	46.2	374
Chelmsford County High School	SEL	46.1	247
Judd School, Tonbridge	SEL	46.0	300
Tiffin School	SEL	46.0	338
King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford	SEL	45.8	306
Kendrick School	SEL	44.6	210
Colchester County High School for Girls	SEL	44.5	202
Dr Challoners Grammar School, Amersham	SEL	44.4	362
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls	SEL	44.1	228
Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe	SEL	44.7	388
Newstead Wood School for Girls	SEL	42.1	252
Wolverhampton Girls' High School	SEL	42.0	199
Beeslack Community High School, Scotland	COMP	41.3	112
Woodford County High School	SEL	41.1	225
Lady Margaret School, London	COMP	40.8	102
Queen Mary's Grammar School for Boys	SEL	40.4	180
King Edward VI Handsworth School, Birmingham	SEL	40.0	221

Watford Grammar School for Girls	COMP	39.9	307
King Edward VI Five Ways School	SEL	39.8	229
Dr Challoner's High School	SEL	39.5	250
Tonbridge Grammar School	SEL	39.3	267
Wilson's School, Surrey	SEL	38.8	227
King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon	SEL	38.8	109
JFS School	COMP	38.1	296
Sutton Grammar School for Boys	SEL	37.7	169
Queen Mary's High School for Girls	SEL	37.7	192
Bishop Wordsworth's Grammar School	SEL	37.6	185
Dame Alice Owen's School	COMP	36.6	310
Hills Road Sixth Form College	SF	36.2	1249
Colyton Grammar School	SEL	36.1	154
Aylesbury Grammar School	SEL	34.9	275
Sir Thomas Rich's School	SEL	34.8	166
Adams' Grammar School	SEL	34.4	186
Ilford County High School	SEL	34.4	180
Ermysteds Grammar School	SEL	34.3	130
Sir William Borlase's Grammar School	SEL	34.1	232
King Edward VI Aston	SEL	33.6	143
Stratford Upon Avon Grammar School	SEL	33.6	109
Skinnners School	SEL	33.6	144
Nonsuch High School for Girls	SEL	33.5	234
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	SEL	33.3	210
Cardinal Vaughan School	COMP	32.6	190
Wycombe High School	SEL	32.5	272
Sutton Coldfield Grammar School for Girls	SEL	31.4	159
Simon Langton School for Boys, Canterbury	SEL	31.4	132

Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School	SEL	31.2	160
St Michael's Catholic Grammar School	SEL	30.9	159
King Edward VI College	SF	30.9	845
Castle College	FE	30.8	299
Ripon Grammar School	SEL	30.8	112
Bishop Vesey's Grammar School	SEL	30.5	161
Royal High School, Edinburgh	COMP	30.1	130
Cranbrook School	SEL	29.7	182
King's School, Peterborough	COMP	29.3	185
Wallington County Grammar School	SEL	29.2	154
Skipton Girls' High School	SEL	28.8	115
Jewel & Esk Valley College	FE	28.5	174
James Gillespie High School, Scotland	COMP	28.4	117
Beaconsfield High School	SEL	28.3	162
Handsworth Grammar School	SEL	28.0	133
West Cliff High School for Boys, West Cliff	SEL	28.0	135
Altrincham Grammar School for Boys	SEL	27.9	154
Wallington High School for Girls	SEL	27.9	194
Torquay Boys' Grammar School	SEL	27.7	168
Camden School for Girls	COMP	27.5	184
High School for Girls, Gloucester	SEL	27.4	115
St Francis Xavier VI Form College	SF	27.4	122
Cherwell School	COMP	27.0	175
Durham Johnston Comprehensive School	COMP	27.0	176
Altrincham Girls' Grammar School	SEL	27.0	148
Peebles High School, Scotland	COMP	26.9	104
Westcliff High School for Girls	SEL	26.8	143
Aylesbury High School	SEL	26.2	214

Craigmount High School, Scotland	COMP	25.9	104
Mill Hill County High School	COMP	25.8	218
Banchory Academy, Scotland	COMP	25.7	115
Royal Latin School	SEL	25.6	178
Dartford Grammar School for Boys	SEL	25.6	212
Bourne Grammar School	SEL	25.4	130
London Oratory School	COMP	24.9	186
Boroughmuir High School, Scotland	COMP	24.8	114
Coopers Company & Coborn School, Upminster	COMP	24.7	179
Old Swinford Hospital, Stourbridge	COMP	24.7	107
Methodist College, Belfast	SEL	24.6	283
Southend High School for Boys	SEL	24.5	112
Southend High School for Girls	SEL	24.3	119
Stroud High School	SEL	24.3	115
Devonport High School for Girls	SEL	24.2	121
Lancaster Girls' Grammar School	SEL	24.1	142
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Horncastle	SEL	23.9	114
St George's School, Hertfordshire	SEL	23.8	123

Table 6: Top 100 non grammar state schools and colleges by ST university hit rate

School	School type	Five year hit rate (%)	Five year admissions
Watford Grammar School for Boys	COMP	46.3	348
Beeslack Community High School, Scotland	COMP	41.3	112
Lady Margaret School, London	COMP	40.8	102
Watford Grammar School for Girls	COMP	39.9	307
JFS School	COMP	38.1	296
Dame Alice Owen's School	COMP	36.6	310
Hills Road Sixth Form College	SF	36.2	1249
Cardinal Vaughan School	COMP	32.6	190
King Edward VI College, Stourbridge	SF	30.9	845
Castle College	FE	30.8	299
Royal High School, Edinburgh	COMP	30.1	130
King's School, Peterborough	COMP	29.3	185
Jewel & Esk Valley College, Scotland	FE	28.5	174
James Gillespie High School, Scotland	COMP	28.4	117
Camden School for Girls	COMP	27.5	184
Cherwell School	COMP	27.0	175
Durham Johnston Comprehensive School	COMP	27.0	176
Peebles High School, Scotland	COMP	26.9	104
Craigmount High School, Scotland	COMP	25.9	104
Mill Hill County High School	COMP	25.8	218
Banchory Academy, Scotland	COMP	25.7	115
London Oratory School	COMP	24.9	186
Boroughmuir High School, Scotland	COMP	24.8	114
Coopers Company & Coborn School, Upminster	COMP	24.7	179
Old Swinford Hospital, Stourbridge	COMP	24.7	107
St George's School, Hertfordshire	COMP	23.7	123

The Chase	COMP	22.8	127
St Aidan's & St John Fisher Associated Sixth Form	COMP	22.6	220
Madras College, Scotland	COMP	22.4	157
Ilkley Grammar School	COMP	22.1	118
Woodhouse College, London	SF	22.1	426
St Leonard's RC School, Durham	COMP	21.7	100
Egglescliffe School	COMP	21.5	106
Stokesley School	COMP	21.4	123
Northampton School for Boys	COMP	21.4	163
Greenhead College	SF	21.3	735
Parmiter's School	COMP	21.2	130
Ecclesbourne School	COMP	21.1	135
Silverdale School	COMP	21.1	125
Harrogate Grammar School	COMP	21.0	138
Cowbridge Comprehensive School, Wales	COMP	20.9	121
St Alban's Girls' School	COMP	20.8	105
Cults Academy, Scotland	COMP	20.8	124
Lady Manners School	COMP	20.7	131
Stratford Upon Avon College	FE	20.7	232
Seven Kings High School	COMP	20.5	171
Balwearie High School, Scotland	COMP	20.4	106
Minister School, Southwell	COMP	20.3	112
Stevenson College	FE	20.1	263
Kenilworth School	COMP	19.7	129
Fallibroome High	COMP	19.6	107
Bishop's Stortford High School	COMP	19.6	119
King Edward VI School, Lichfield	COMP	19.2	103
Sharnbrook Upper School	COMP	19.1	184

Bishop Luffa School	COMP	19.0	101
Tapton School	COMP	19.0	130
Saffron Walden County High School	COMP	18.9	120
Peter Symonds College	SF	18.9	873
Stratford Upon Avon College	FE	18.9	138
Stanwell Comprehensive School, Wales	Comp	18.7	109
High Storrs School	COMP	18.7	117
Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College	COMP	18.6	105
Drayton Manor High School	COMP	18.5	102
Joseph Chamberlain College, Birmingham	SF	18.5	181
Richmond School	COMP	18.5	105
Bilborough College	SF	18.4	374
Ashby School	COMP	18.2	135
George Abbot School	COMP	18.0	125
St Dominic's Sixth Form College	SF	18.0	289
Wymondham College	COMP	17.8	107
Howard of Effingham School	COMP	17.7	111
Cadbury Sixth Form College	SF	17.6	343
Fortismere School	COMP	17.5	116
St Bartholomew's School	COMP	17.5	107
Queen Elizabeth High School, Northumberland	COMP	17.3	146
Graveney School	COMP	17.1	159
Cardiff High School, Wales	COMP	17.1	110
Bishop Stopford School	COMP	17.0	118
King Edward VII School, Sheffield	COMP	16.8	131
Prince Henry's High School	COMP	16.5	103
King Edward VI School, Northumberland	COMP	16.3	126
Solihull VI Form College	SF	16.2	617

Godalming College	SF	16.1	377
Thomas Telford School	COMP	16.0	106
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College	SF	15.9	299
City of Norwich School	COMP	15.7	102
Brighton, Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College	SF	15.7	263
Hereford Sixth Form College	SF	15.6	317
Central Sussex College	SF	15.5	157
Richard Huish College	SF	14.8	343
Danum School	COMP	14.8	102
Thomas Hardy School	COMP	14.7	128
King Edward VII School, Leicestershire	COMP	14.2	100
Alton College	FE	14.2	335
Olchfa Comprehensive School, Wales	COMP	14.1	119
Warwickshire College	FE	13.7	345
Worcester Sixth Form College	SF	13.7	260
Northgate High School	COMP	13.7	120
Sixth Form College, Farnborough	SF	13.7	429
Beauchamp College	COMP	13.6	225

Data and definitions

The analysis was based on figures supplied by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and Cambridge and Oxford Universities individually.

UCAS data

This comprised numbers of university applications and accepted university applicants each year during the period 2001-06 for each school and sixth form college registered on the UCAS database. This includes all those schools that at some time had a pupil who applied for a full time undergraduate place at a UK university or higher education institution.

The analysis in this report relates solely to the figures for accepted university applicants. Figures for schools outside the UK or for schools based in the UK aimed at students from overseas were excluded from the analysis.

Approximately 20,000 applicants made at least one application for deferred entry into university each of the past three years. These applicants appear in the UCAS statistics only in the year in which they apply.

Two sets of figures for applications and accepted university applicants for each school were provided – those for all higher education institutions and those for a group of 13 research-led universities known as the Sutton Trust 13. The 13 universities are: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial, LSE, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrew's, UCL, Warwick, York.

Cambridge and Oxford data

Data supplied by Cambridge University is based on year of entry of applicants rather than the year of application (the earlier application deadline for the Oxbridge universities is in the previous year to the year of admission for students).

Figures from Oxford University were supplied in hard copy reports detailing applications and offers made to students during the last five years. The assumption made is that the vast majority of students accept offers and are admitted at the university.

Average point scores for A-levels or equivalent qualifications

The average point scores for A-levels or equivalent qualifications for pupils published annually by the Department for Children, Schools and Family in school performance tables are based on a specific scoring system developed by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority.

The figures quoted in the annual performance tables for schools and sixth form colleges are different to those used under the tariff deployed by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, also based on for A-levels or equivalent qualifications.

In the text of this report we use the term 'average A-level score' as shorthand for the QCA performance score, published in the annual school tables. Strictly, this term applies only to those schools where pupils are taking A-levels and not other equivalent qualifications.

Under the QCA scoring system, A-level points are calculated as follows: A grade equals 270; B = 240; C = 210; D = 180; E = 150.

The average point score per student is calculated as the sum of the points awarded to each 16-18 year old student divided by the total number of 16-18 year old students at the end of study towards General and Vocational A/AS or equivalent Level 3 qualifications.

The Department for Children, Schools and Family provides the following example of how a score is calculated: If student A achieves 2 General A-levels at grade B, a Vocational A-level at grade C and a General AS pass at grade D, they would score 780 points (240 + 240 + 210 + 90).



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