Admission Statement

Oxford University Geography Society

The University of Oxford's annual admissions statistical report crunches the numbers on undergraduate admissions. Data is aggregated across three years to determine the amount of progress made on the university's aim to widen access and the raw proportions of students from different backgrounds.

With much of the data grouped by subject, we at the geography society wished to examine how geography stood up against the university average and, perhaps more importantly, whether the rates of admissions to study geography at the University of Oxford were acceptable compared to population data.

Key Findings

- The proportion of students from socio-economically disadvantaged areas admitted to study geography falls within the bottom third of the 25 most popular subjects.
- University wide, there has been a slight lapse in the number of students from areas of low progression to higher education, with 16.6% of students admitted in 2022 being from POLAR 1 and 2 areas. Admissions of students within these categories to study geography from 2020 to 2022 was significantly lower at 14.8%.
- Students admitted in 2022 who were eligible for free school meals sat at 7.3%, compared to 22.5% of pupils nationally.
- Geography continues to admit a larger proportion of state school students than the average of the top 25 courses at 71.6%. This is lower, however, than the proportion of those achieving the top grades from state schools, with 79.1% of those achieving AAA+ and 76.9% of those getting A*A*A* at A level being from state schools.
- 68.8% of UK geographers admitted to Geography from 2020 to 2022 were female.
- The proportion of UK students admitted across the university from BME backgrounds increased by 3.2% from 2021 to 2022. Geography, however, has the 4th smallest proportion of students from BME backgrounds of the top 25 courses.
- Intake of UK students from Asian backgrounds has increased by 2.7% university wide. Geography has the joint 7th lowest proportion of UK students from Asian backgrounds of the top 25 courses.
- The proportion of students with Black African or Black Caribbean heritage has decreased slightly since 2021, and has shown little improvement since 2019, making up 3.3% of students admitted in 2022. 1.3% of UK geographers admitted from 2020 to 2022 have Black African or Black Caribbean heritage, the 5th lowest of the top 25 most popular courses.
- UK students from mixed-heritage backgrounds made up 8.8% of admissions in 2022. Geography had the 9th lowest proportion of students from mixed-heritage backgrounds.
- Whilst data on the admission of students with a declared disability is not aggregated by course, the proportion has increased steadily since 2018, with 12.8% of students admitted in 2022 having a declared disability. This proportion is lower than the average across all UK universities (17.1%) and Russell Group universities (12.8%).

Thoughts from our Access Officer:

As reflected in the foreword of this year's report, progress continues to be made in widening the range of backgrounds that Oxford's talented cohorts of students are admitted from. Thanks to many actors, such as those supporting Opportunity Oxford, a programme that I personally benefited from, progress is certainly being made across the university. However, this has not been proportionally felt across all courses, with geography significantly behind. I was hopeful that I may be able to offer some light and shade. However, upon analysis of geography specific data, I feel that there is little to be satisfied with.

Whilst we continue to have above average state school representation, I feel as though this has become a crutch to lean on, taking the weight off the shameful burden of poor admission rates from those from socio-economically deprived areas and BME (particularly Black African and Black Caribbean heritage) backgrounds. Rather than relying on the idea that state school representation is the ultimate move away from the stereotypes of Oxford and Geography, we must take action to encourage applications from students from underrepresented backgrounds on the course. The outreach programmes lead by of the School of Geography and the Environment must continue to demonstrate the merit of a geography degree, with extra work being put in to ensure that those underrepresented within the department are specifically targeted.

There is also room for improvement in the categories used in the report. Whilst I welcome the increased nuance in categorisation of gender, with the inclusion of genders 'other' than male or female, and the further breakdown of the rather broad category of UK Asian students to examine progress in the admission of students from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds, it is imperative that this nuance is extended. This should be both in further breaking down broad categories, such as that of mixed heritage students, and to aggregate all data by course. This would allow departments, such as the school of geography and the environment, to target outreach programmes more accurately. Whilst commenting on such intricacies of the report may seem trivial, I believe that reframing such reports can make a difference in assessing the amount of progress made, encouraging us to push for a more diverse cohort in future.

Geography is for anyone who wants to learn more about the world we live in, and anyone who has considered applying should not have to feel discouraged by a lack of diversity. I hope that more progress is made, and as the current access officer, I will continue to work towards this, alongside current and prospective students, and the department.

Thoughts from our President:

It is heartwarming to see that Geography continues to admit a larger proportion of state school students than the average of Oxford's most popular courses. This is testament to the good work done by the previous committee to widen access to a Geography education in Oxford. However, the results from this year's report are otherwise dismal, indicating lapses in the admissions of students from disadvantaged and BAME backgrounds.

As a BAME student myself, I am aware of the hurdles non-White and International students have to silently climb to access prestigious institutions like Oxford. Many of these include a lack of informal networks in higher education, language barriers especially for students from migrant families, unfamiliarity with the admissions process and a lack of BAME representation within the department and colleges. This needs to change. Geography is a discipline that prides itself on being progressive, inclusive and change-making, especially with championing marginalised voices. It is thus critical that elevating the perspectives of BAME staff and students in Geography becomes a new focus of access efforts. I, and our Access Officer, Daisy, are working hard to illuminate this through upcoming outreach initiatives. In the upcoming Alternative Prospectus and OUGS podcast, we have included resources tailored to students from BAME backgrounds, as well as ensured that the perspectives and stories of BAME geographers are shared.

Moreover, we continue to work closely with the department to increase access to socio-economically disadvantaged students. Our committee members have been involved in volunteer-led school tours, alumni sharings in state schools and admissions help opportunity programmes. While I am pleased that access work has consistently been done in this area for the past few years, it is important that we do not stop talking about such efforts. This is so that high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds are continually reminded of the resources available to them and encouraged to apply to Oxford.

While the results of this year's report fell short of expectations, I am confident that OUGS is on the right track to increase long-term access to Geography in Oxford, through its resource-building, inclusion and outreach efforts. Daisy and I have communicated closely with the department on our access needs and are excited to launch a new belt of initiatives this coming academic year, which strives to improve Geography's admission statistics.