

Formulating admissions targets for the University of Cambridge's Access and Participation Plan (2020-21 to 2024-25)

As stated in the 2020-21 to 2024-25 Access and Participation Plan, 'the University [of Cambridge] wishes to ensure that a representative cross section of society is represented within its student body, who can access the same opportunities and quality of experience'.¹ We have therefore formulated admissions targets (across three different characteristics) for four groups of students that we know, from sources including our recent self-assessment, are currently under-represented at the University of Cambridge compared to the United Kingdom (UK) population as a whole,^{1;2} with the goal of considerably increasing the proportion of entrants from these groups by the end of the Plan period (2024-25). This paper outlines the methodology used to formulate these targets.

In the 2020-21 to 2024-25 Access and Participation Plan the University of Cambridge has set targets to increase the proportion of UK resident students admitted from:

- **UK state maintained sector schools/colleges;**
- **Participation of Local Areas 4 quintile 1 (POLAR4 Q1) areas,** and the ratio between the quintile with the highest representation in higher education (POLAR4 Q5) and the quintile with the lowest representation (POLAR Q1);
- **POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 areas;**
- **regional Indices of Multiple Deprivation³ quintile 1 and 2 (IMD Q1 and Q2) areas.**

Whilst the exact methodology used to formulate the targets differed for the four groups (students from the state maintained sector, from POLAR4 Q1 areas, from POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 areas, and from IMD Q1 or Q2 areas), there were two key principles to their formulation methods. These are explained first, below; specific details of the formulation of each the four admissions targets, and the targets themselves, then follow.

- 1) *Identification of the proportion of students from each group that the University of Cambridge would expect to admit in order to mirror the UK sector (once Key Stage 5 attainment and location are factored in)*

Each year the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) publish a series of UK Performance Indicators, and their benchmarks, for all publicly funded Higher Education (HE) providers in the UK (and one privately funded provider).⁴ These give information about the participation of groups that are under-represented in HE relative to the population as a whole, taking into account 'the entry qualifications of a HE provider's students, the subjects they studied, and their age'.⁵ A number of these benchmarks also, in addition, take account of where an HE provider's students come from – the 'location-adjusted' benchmarks.

The University of Cambridge commissioned HESA to produce a wider set of location-adjusted benchmarks than it current publishes (to give information about the participation of other groups that are known to be under-represented at the University of Cambridge relative to the population as a whole) using the same

¹ Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25
https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/university_of_cambridge_app_2020_25.pdf

² Entry gaps paper
<https://www.cao.cam.ac.uk/2019-entry-rate-self-assessment>

³ The University of Cambridge undergraduate admissions website provides further detail of what is meant by 'regional' Indices of Multiple Deprivation: <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/contextual-data>

⁴ HESA website; Widening participation: UK Performance Indicators 2017/18, published 7 February 2019
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-02-2019/widening-participation-tables>

⁵ HESA website; Data and Analysis, UK Performance Indicators, Benchmarks (applicable to tables T1 to T3, T7 and E1)
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/benchmarks>

methodology.^{6,7} This data was then used to determine at what level the University should be admitting these four groups of students in order for our admissions to be representative of the UK sector, having taken into account intended subject of study, Key Stage 5 attainment, age on entry and location.

2) *Additional uplifts to further increase the proportion of students admitted from groups known to be considerably under-represented in HE admission in the sector as a whole*

For some groups of UK resident students there is considerable under-representation in HE admission across the UK sector. The University of Cambridge is committed to considerably narrowing the admissions gaps for these groups, and does not believe that seeking to ensure our admissions for these groups are representative of the UK sector currently (based on the HESA benchmark data) is sufficiently ambitious.

Therefore when formulating the admissions targets for students from POLAR4, and IMD, Q1 or Q2 areas we have added an additional uplift. These uplifts have been calculated by examining the collegiate University's current applicant field and admissions patterns, and modelling the impact that a variety of strategies to improve access and participation could have on this. The University of Cambridge has intentionally set its level of ambition high, ensuring that the targets formulated are stretching (beyond the maximum potential for admissions from our current applicant field) and that they will therefore likely require commitment to new approaches in the admissions process.

The proportion of UK resident students admitted from the state maintained sector

Whilst school/college type is not a characteristic used by the Office for Students, it is one of the UK Performance Indicators published annually by HESA to allow comparison between UK HE providers. Furthermore our internal analysis has shown that each of the under-represented geo-demographic groups identified in the Access and Participation Plan appear in far greater numbers in state maintained schools/colleges, as do students from low income households who are not identified by any of the measures currently available to us. Nonetheless, we also recognise that the state versus independent binary masks a range of educational experiences. With this in mind the University of Cambridge has formulated the 2024-25 state maintained sector admissions target such that it is based entirely on the HESA location-adjusted benchmark for our institution (i.e. that it will be representative of the UK sector, having taken into account intended subject of study, Key Stage 5 attainment, age on entry and location).

Our goal is that **by 2024-25** students admitted from UK **state maintained sector** schools/colleges will comprise **69.1%** of the total UK resident intake (an increase from the 2017-18 position of 63.4%).

The proportion of UK resident students admitted from POLAR4 Q1 areas, and the POLAR4 Q5:Q1 ratio

Students from POLAR4 Q1 areas are under-represented both in admission to the University of Cambridge, and in HE admission across the UK sector as a whole. As a result the University of Cambridge's 2024-25 POLAR4 Q1 admissions target has been formulated by setting the level of ambition at a proportion that considerably exceeds the HESA location-adjusted benchmark, in order to ensure that it is highly stretching.

The location-adjusted HESA benchmark for our institution suggests that the University would expect students admitted from POLAR4 Q1 areas to comprise 4.5% of the total UK resident intake if the University's admissions were representative of the UK sector (accounting for intended subject of study, Key Stage 5 attainment, age on entry, and location). However our intention is to exceed this. Our goal is therefore that **by 2024-25** the proportion of students admitted from **POLAR4 Q1 areas** will comprise **7.0%** of the total UK resident intake

⁶ Source: HESA Student Record 2017/18. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited. Neither the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited nor HESA Services Limited can accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from data or other information supplied by HESA Services.

⁷ The current performance indicators and benchmarks we purchased from HESA are based on data for all young full-time undergraduate entrants (equivalent to the T1b tables published by HESA: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-02-2019/widening-participation-tables>)

(nearly double the 2017-18 position of 4.1%), and the **POLAR4 Q5:Q1 ratio** will fall to **6.7:1** (from 14.1:1) in the same time period.

The proportion of UK resident students admitted from POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 areas

Students from POLAR4 Q2 areas are also under-represented in admission to the University of Cambridge, and across the UK sector as a whole, albeit to a lesser extent than those from POLAR4 Q1 areas. The University of Cambridge's 2024-25 POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 admissions target has been formulated based on both (for the Q1 component) the considerable level of ambition for POLAR4 Q1 described above and (for the Q2 component) the HESA location-adjusted benchmark for students from POLAR4 Q2 areas with an additional uplift, in order to ensure that this target is more ambitious than matching the level currently attained across the UK HE sector as a whole.

The location-adjusted HESA benchmark for our institution suggests that the University would expect students admitted from POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 areas to comprise 12.9% of the total UK resident intake if the University's admissions were representative of the UK sector (accounting for intended subject of study, Key Stage 5 attainment, age on entry, and location). However our intention is to exceed this. Our goal is therefore that **by 2024-25** the proportion of students admitted from **POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 areas** will comprise **16.6%** of the total UK resident intake (an increase from the 2017-18 position of 11.1%).

The proportion of UK resident students admitted from regional IMD Q1 or Q2 areas

Students from IMD Q1 or Q2 areas are also under-represented in admission to the University of Cambridge, and across the UK sector as a whole. The University of Cambridge's 2024-25 regional IMD Q1 and Q2 admissions target has been formulated by applying an additional uplift to the HESA location-adjusted benchmark for students from regional IMD Q1 or Q2 areas, in order to ensure that this target is more ambitious than matching the level currently attained across the UK HE sector as a whole.

The location-adjusted HESA benchmark for our institution suggests that the University would expect students admitted from regional IMD Q1 or Q2 areas to comprise 17.5% of the total UK resident intake if the University's admissions were representative of the UK sector (accounting for intended subject of study, Key Stage 5 attainment, age on entry, and location). However our intention is to exceed this. Our goal is therefore that **by 2024-25** the proportion of students admitted from regional **IMD Q1 or Q2 areas** will comprise **21.2%** of the total UK resident intake (an increase from the 2017-18 position of 15.5%).

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