

FREE SCHOOL MEALS AS A PROXY FOR DISADVANTAGE.

26th September 2013

A spokesman for the University of Cambridge said:-

“The University of Cambridge uses a range of contextual indicators, including eligibility for Free School Meals, for the purpose of targeting our outreach work. The University uses a range of indicators because we believe that no single measure accurately captures disadvantage and under-representation.

The limitations of FSM as a proxy for disadvantage and as a widening participation measure are acknowledged by the UK Government. The data excludes individuals who choose not to claim FSM. It excludes those with incomes too high to claim FSM who may still be regarded as disadvantaged. It excludes mature students, as it is captured at a single point in time – at age 15.¹ Universities are not provided with data on the eligibility of their applicants for FSM.

The University’s own data² suggests that the official statistics on FSM significantly under-report participation. Our 2012 intake included 50+ students who had previously been in receipt of FSM. Around 10% of our current undergraduate body meets the household income threshold for FSM entitlement.

The biggest single factor affecting entrance to highly selective universities is prior attainment. Such data as is available suggests that less than 200 students per year who are recorded as being eligible for FSM secure grades of AAA or better at A-level. The typical entrance requirement for Cambridge is A*AA, and so on that basis the University admits in excess of one quarter of all FSM students who attain the grades that would make them eligible for entry³.

The University engages in extensive outreach work throughout the UK. The goal of this work is to ensure that any UK student with the ability, passion and commitment to apply to Cambridge has a clear picture of what the University can offer them, and receives all the support necessary for them to best demonstrate their potential.

The University is committed to the principle that no UK student should be deterred from applying because of financial concerns, and makes available a flexible and generous financial support package.”

NOTES

1 Notes on the limitations of FSM taken from BIS report:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32585/11-1082-widening-participation-higher-education-aug-2011-v3.pdf

2 University of Cambridge students applying for financial support under the National Scholarship Programme were asked to indicate if they had previously been in receipt of FSM. 50 students who entered Cambridge in 2012 indicated that they had received FSM, more than twice the number captured in government statistics.

3 A fuller analysis of FSM and applications to Cambridge:

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/admissions/behindtheheadlines/schoolmeals.htm>
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