# Over 10% of Oxford offers come from just 14 schools, exposing widening inequality in admissions



The aspiration to attend Oxford University continues to ignite passion among students, yet the reality of admissions reflects a stark disparity within the educational landscape. Recent statistics reveal that over 10% of offers extended by Oxford originate from just 14 schools, a situation that poses challenging questions about accessibility and meritocracy in higher education.

These 14 schools, predominantly elite institutions, include well-known names such as Eton College and Westminster School. Westminster, with 38 offers from more than 100 applications last year, boasts an acceptance rate of 37%. A current student there described to Cherwell the pervasive ethos surrounding Oxbridge ambition: “If you’re sitting in a classroom, either you, the person to your left, or the person to your right is likely to get in, statistically.” This intense focus on Oxbridge begins early; Westminster prepares its students through tailored assessments and extensive support for university applications.

Conversely, Harris Westminster, a state school established with the ambition to emulate its prestigious neighbour, reported an impressive 32 offers. Despite being a state-funded institution, its rigorous selection process and the support it receives have positioned it as a formidable contender in the Oxbridge admissions game. One of its alumni noted that while support was comprehensive, the experience could be overwhelming, with a demanding schedule designed to foster a “well-rounded” academic profile often leading to student burnout.

Strikingly, the geographical and socio-economic distribution of these elite schools underscores systemic inequalities. Of the 14 schools generating a disproportionate share of offers, nearly all are located in the affluent south of England, exemplifying the concentration of educational resources in wealthier regions. For instance, King Edward VI School in Stratford-upon-Avon is the only institution situated significantly north of Birmingham, raising eyebrows about the equity of opportunity nationwide.

This regional bias is further exacerbated by the ongoing decline of state school representation in Oxford admissions. In 2023, the percentage of state school students admitted dipped to 67.6%, contrasting with a higher figure of 68.1% from the previous year. Such figures suggest a concerning trend where the disparity between state and independent school admissions endures. The efforts made by the University—including outreach programmes such as UNIQ and Opportunity Oxford—have yet to yield significant improvements in the overall admissions landscape.

Historically, the government’s investment in education saw a steep decline under recent administrations, prompting concerns about the future of equitable educational access. David Blunkett, former Secretary of State for Education, highlighted that as funding for state schools dwindles, the likelihood of a two-tier system becomes more pronounced. Despite the government's aim to widen access, the structure still appears to favour those from historically established networks of privilege.

Moreover, powerful voices have begun calling for radical reforms to address this entrenched inequality. Some experts and advocates propose that leading universities limit their intake from private schools to foster greater social mobility and inclusivity within elite circles. A recent report from the Sutton Trust illustrates that eight prestigious schools account for more admissions to Oxbridge than a substantial majority of other UK schools, exemplifying the urgent need for systemic change.

In response to these concerns, the Oxford Student Union emphasised the necessity of transparency in the admissions process. They argue that Oxford should publish more detailed data to hold itself accountable for equal access and potential reform. A spokesperson from the University reaffirmed its commitment to diversifying the student body and noted that many initiatives are already in place to support under-represented students. However, the compounded challenge remains: ensuring that these efforts lead to meaningful changes rather than mere cosmetic adjustments.

While Oxford University presents itself as a bastion of meritocracy, the reality is that the doors of opportunity remain firmly closed for many who do not hail from privileged backgrounds. As educational inequality persists, the dream of attending such a revered institution remains elusive for countless aspiring students. The implications of these trends demand urgent attention and action to truly reflect the diversity of talent across the UK.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/)
* Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[2]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24378460.university-oxford-state-school-admissions-drops/)
* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/education/oxbridge-admissions-acceptance-pupils-school-uk-fee-costs-students-a8671246.html)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz99q8nvyy7o)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/sep/12/radical-action-more-state-school-pupils-oxbridge-oxford-cambridge)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[6]](https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students)
* Paragraph 9: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[6]](https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students)
* Paragraph 10: [[1]](https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/), [[7]](https://www.cherwell.org/2024/12/06/oxford-state-school-offer-rate-has-decreased-over-the-last-five-years/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cherwell.org/2025/05/18/over-10-percent-of-oxford-offers-come-from-just-14-schools/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24378460.university-oxford-state-school-admissions-drops/> - This article reports a decline in the proportion of state school pupils admitted to the University of Oxford. In 2023, 67.6% of successful UK-domiciled undergraduates were from state schools, a decrease from 68.1% in the previous year. Despite this drop, the figure remains higher than in 2019, when 62.3% of UK undergraduates were from state schools. The article also notes an increase in the number of state school students applying to Oxford, from 9,965 in 2022 to 10,150 in 2023, and the number of offers made to state-educated pupils increased from 1,851 to 1,935.
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/education/oxbridge-admissions-acceptance-pupils-school-uk-fee-costs-students-a8671246.html> - This article discusses a report highlighting that eight schools send more pupils to Oxbridge than three-quarters of the rest of UK schools combined. The Sutton Trust's report reveals that the majority of these schools are independent, fee-paying institutions, including Eton, Westminster School, and St Paul’s School. The article criticizes top universities for this disparity and calls for more efforts to tackle 'inequality of access'. It also notes that despite improvements in admission policies, pupils from prestigious private schools maintain a disproportionate grip on Oxbridge and Russell Group university places.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz99q8nvyy7o> - This article reports that the proportion of state-educated pupils accepted by Oxford University has fallen for the third consecutive year. In 2023, 67.6% of successful UK-domiciled undergraduates were from state schools, down from 68.1% the previous year. Despite this decline, the figure remains higher than in 2019, when 62.3% of UK undergraduates were from state schools. The article also notes an increase in the number of UK-domiciled Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students admitted since 2019.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/sep/12/radical-action-more-state-school-pupils-oxbridge-oxford-cambridge> - This article discusses a call for leading universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, to limit their intake of privately educated UK undergraduates to 10% each year. The authors argue that pupils from prestigious private schools, such as Eton and Winchester, have maintained a disproportionate grip on Oxbridge and Russell Group university places, despite recent improvements in admission policies. The article emphasizes the need for universities to take radical action to boost social mobility and improve access to elite professions.
6. <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students> - This page provides detailed statistics on undergraduate admissions at the University of Oxford. It highlights the increasing competitiveness of admissions and the university's commitment to attracting students from a diverse range of backgrounds, including those from areas of social and economic disadvantage. The page also notes that while some groups remain under-represented, the university is dedicated to building a more inclusive community and expanding outreach activities to engage students earlier in their educational journey.
7. <https://www.cherwell.org/2024/12/06/oxford-state-school-offer-rate-has-decreased-over-the-last-five-years/> - This article reports that Oxford University's state school offer rate has decreased over the last five years. Despite efforts to widen participation, the university still lags behind the national average number of state-school students by over 20% and was the seventh lowest proportion out of the 24 Russell Group universities in 2021. The article also discusses the university's outreach programs, such as the UNIQ programme, and notes that while these initiatives are positive, there has been only a minor increase in applications from state-school students and virtually no difference in the number of students from state schools who are admitted.