



Rt. Hon. DAVID LAMMY MP

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Professor Louise Richardson
Vice Chancellor
University of Oxford
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Wellington Square
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25th October 2017

Dear Professor Richardson and Professor Toope

Re: Access to Oxford and Cambridge

We are writing to you regarding access to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge following the publication of data under the Freedom of Information Act which painted a very troubling picture. We are united in our acknowledgement of and support for the outstanding education that your universities provide, but our elite universities must not be elitist, drawing up the ladder to success and reinforcing privilege.

Whilst we welcome commitments that you have made to improving access and widening participation both in agreements with the Office for Fair Access and elsewhere, the data shows that sufficient progress is not being made. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge continue to draw the overwhelming majority of their students from a small minority both in terms of geography and socio-economic background.

It is of grave concern that the proportion of offers made to applicants from the top two social classes has increased since 2010. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge receive over £800 million each year directly from the taxes paid by our constituents, including the huge swathes of the country that are hugely under-represented with regards to the number of offers made to students from Oxbridge. The fact that a quarter of all students – almost 9,000 – are drawn from just eight local education authority areas, whereas the bottom eight areas account for just 39 is symptomatic of a huge regional disparity in access that requires urgent action.

We are disappointed that students from more affluent areas of London, the Home Counties and the South East more generally receive such a disproportionate number of offers. We know first-hand that talent exists right across the country and that talented young people in our own areas would benefit hugely from an Oxbridge education.

We are also deeply disappointed that a large number of Oxbridge colleges did not make a single offer to a Black student each year. The Government has set the tone on transparency and openness in the recent racial disparity unit, and we urge you to take action to address the under-representation of ethnic minorities at Oxbridge.

Much more work is required to find the most talented students who may be from disadvantaged backgrounds, lack the confidence or support networks to apply to Oxbridge or live in parts of the country and attend schools that do not traditionally send many students to Oxbridge. We call on you to take the initiative in directly contacting talented and straight A students, whether following GCSE, AS Level or A Level results, and in reaching out to parts



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of our society and our country that are under-represented.

It is clear that a diffuse college admissions system has created a patchwork situation, with some colleges working hard to widen access and others lagging far behind. We believe that for real and sustained progress to be achieved consideration must be given to a more centralised admissions process and means to address the shortcomings of what can be a highly subjective collegiate admissions system.

The evidence suggests that a foundation year model is an effective method of improving access for students from under-represented backgrounds, and all but one of the first intake to the Lady Margaret Hall foundation year subsequently secured full places. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge and their constituent colleges certainly have the wealth and income to fund foundation years, and if colleges are committed to improving access and widening participation then this model or similar models to attract and support students from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds should be rolled out across all colleges without delay.

An Oxbridge education is still seen as a golden ticket into a top job and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge – supported by significant taxpayer funding – still hold the key to a job in our top professions. Whilst we do not doubt that you are aware of your responsibility to ensure that the most talented students, regardless of their background, apply and are offered a place to study at our top universities, we call on you to set out exactly what steps you will be taking to address this situation and make good on this responsibility.

Yours sincerely

Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Minister for Higher Education 2007-10

Angela Rayner MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Gordon Marsden MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Skills

Dawn Butler MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Chair, Education Select Committee

Debbie Abrahams MP

Heidi Alexander MP

Rushanara Ali MP

Mike Amesbury MP

Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

Clive Betts MP

Roberta Blackman Woods MP

Tracy Brabin MP

Kevin Brennan MP

Chris Bryant MP

Karen Buck MP

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP

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John Woodcock MP

CC: Jo Johnson MP, Minister for Universities and Science

CC: Professor Les Ebdon, Director, Office for Fair Access