

# Using data to drive admissions targets



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# OFFA Guidance

“You must [...] review your plans to consider how you can spend smarter, basing your decisions on the best evidence available [...] To do this you will need to ensure that you have reliable data available to you, using national datasets and your own monitoring and evaluation, to determine where there are particular areas which your own institution needs to address”

*OFFA, Strategic guidance: developing your 2017-18 access agreement, 01.2016*

# Where can we find “reliable” data on student performance and outcomes?

- National Pupil Database (NPD)
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
- Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
- Individual Learner Record (ILR)
- HEAT planning datasets

# What can influence our use of this data?

## Institution Type

- Accepted qualification types
- Subject offering
- Age profile
- Offer level

## Stage of the student life-cycle

- Targeting outreach work
- Targeting recruitment work
- Evaluating outreach/recruitment work
- Influencing admissions policy
- Improving student retention and outcomes
- Improving graduate outcomes

# NPD

## Pros

- Individual level data on students studying at all school types in England
- Can track students from KS2 to KS5 using unique identifiers
- Subject and grade information on a range of qualifications
- Personal characteristics, including ethnicity, POLAR3 and other details are present (or can be requested if a lookup is provided)
- Data is free

## Cons

- Personal characteristics are not available for all students
- Student information cannot be linked to individual participants
- Size and complexity of the dataset requires time and skill to manage
- Data is subject to a number of restrictions and the application process can take time to complete (at least in the first instance)
- There is a fairly significant wait for the data (1-3 months) so pre-planning is crucial

## Pros

- Individual level data on students studying at HEIs in the UK
- Data relating to student achievement in HE and DLHE data for post-HE outcomes
- Personal characteristics, including ethnicity, POLAR3 and other details are present (or can be requested if a lookup is provided)
- Some data can be matched directly to individual students attending outreach programmes

## Cons

- Available data on qualifications is not as detailed as NPD
- Data can be costly
- Only students who progressed to University (and remained for at least one term) are included in the dataset
- Size and complexity of the dataset requires time and skill to manage (although it is easier than the NPD)

## Pros

- Subject and grade information on a range of pre-HE qualifications
- Data relating to applications is available
- Personal characteristics, including ethnicity, POLAR3 and other details are present
- Some data can be matched anonymously to students
- Very simple to use

## Cons

- Data can be expensive
- Rounding and suppression can introduce large error bounds when using small datasets
- Unless supplied by the institution, no individual, student level data is available
- Data restricted to UCAS provided variables

# OFFA Guidance

“When using data to inform your plans and activities, we encourage you to examine multiple characteristics in order to get a better understanding of under-representation and disadvantage and associated differential outcomes [...] This will help you to more effectively target your access, student success and progression activities at the students with the most need”

OFFA, *Strategic guidance: developing your 2017-18 access agreement*, 01.2016

# How does the sector define “disadvantage”

## Personal characteristics

- Care Status
- Refugee Status
- FSM
- Young Carer status
- Ethnicity
- Household occupation
- Familial knowledge of HE

# Neighbourhood deprivation as a proxy for individual circumstances

## Commonly used geo-demographic measures:

- POLAR3
- ACORN
- IMD
- OAC

# How have we assessed these geo-demographic measures at the University of Cambridge?

- Analysis of under-representation at the University of Cambridge
- Analysis of socio-economic status (as determined by the NS-SEC)
- Analysis of financial disadvantage (as measured by means-tested financial awards given to students through the Cambridge Bursary Scheme)

# Defining under-representation

- Subject-specific or general admission?
- Population
- Age-adjusted population
- Attainment-adjusted population
- Subject/qualification-adjusted population

# Obtaining population data for each geo-demographic measure

- POLAR3
- ACORN
- IMD
- OAC

# Aspects for further investigation

- Exploring different combinations of indicators to improve targeting of outreach activity
- Exploring financial information held through the SLC
- Regional variance in performance
- Educational difference across other qualification types

# Questions?

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