

Oxbridge Ambassador for Wales

**Analysis of higher  
education destinations of  
Welsh high achievers  
between 2008–13**

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In the course of the Oxbridge Ambassador Project, the question arose of the range of higher education destinations of Wales' high-achieving students. This research has assisted the Oxbridge Ambassador in assessing the scope of the Oxbridge challenge.

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## **Background**

In the course of the Oxbridge Ambassador Project, the question arose of the range of higher education destinations of Wales' high achieving students. This research has assisted the Oxbridge Ambassador in assessing the scope of the Oxbridge challenge. Welsh students are applying to research intensive universities in significant numbers – the 'Oxbridge issue' is not necessarily a Russell Group issue. This paper also explores the attitudes of students to studying outside of Wales. Anecdotally, we were concerned that an unwillingness to move beyond the border was limiting the choices of Wales' high achievers, but this does not appear to be the case.

## Data gathered

In order to identify the higher education destinations of Welsh high achievers, a dataset was purchased from UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Service). UCAS administers undergraduate applications for all UK universities, and collects data on the destination of all higher education applicants. There is no other organisation which collects and distributes this information.

We requested a dataset of the higher education destinations of high achieving students. These are Welsh domiciled students who achieved AAA or above at A-level between 2008-13. We requested data to be provided on a local authority basis, in order to identify any geographical discrepancies in destinations. We identified five categories of destination, and for each local authority, received the number of students in each category. These were:

- Russell Group university outside of Wales (ie excluding Cardiff)
- Russell Group university outside of Wales excluding Oxford and Cambridge
- Russell Group university in Wales (ie Cardiff University)
- Other Welsh university
- Other university (ie non Welsh non Russell Group)

In order to preserve anonymity, UCAS routinely redacts any result of three or fewer students. Where a result of more than three has been returned, we were also given the named university and number of students who were admitted. This has been helpful in explaining some discrepancies in the data presented.

## Results of analysis

The table below outlines the average proportion of Welsh high achievers across 22 local authorities who attended each category of university between 2008-13. Almost a quarter of high achievers progress to Cardiff University, which is unsurprising as this is the only Russell Group university in Wales, and has many higher tariff courses<sup>1</sup>. Over half of the cohort go to Russell Group universities in the rest of the UK. This group of universities represent the most competitive courses in the UK. Although other higher tariff courses exist in other institutions, the Russell Group is a reasonable proxy for competitive , research intensive universities. Again, the overall proportion of students progressing to these universities is unsurprising given that high achievers may be attracted to higher tariff courses. The remaining fifth of the cohort attended other universities, either in Wales or in the rest of the UK. This may be because a student lives near an excellent local university or has pursued a particular course which is highly rated or only offered in a few institutions.

**Table 1.1: Proportion of Welsh AAA students attending categories of universities between 2008-13**

<b>% to Cardiff University</b>	<b>% to non-Welsh Russell Group university</b>	<b>% other university in Wales</b>	<b>% other in UK</b>
23.2%	55.6%	6.2%	15.0%

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<sup>1</sup> Courses which have high entry requirements, generally A\*-B grades at A-level

## Regional variation

Having identified the average for Welsh high achievers, we then assessed local variation from this baseline. This data is provided in Annex A. It is not always straightforward to compare the proportion of students attending each category of university by local authority as in some cases, the small number of students in the local authority cohort produce distorting proportions when compared with other local authorities. It is necessary to look at overall number of students alongside the proportions.

An average of 78.8% of high achievers in Wales go to a Russell Group university, either Cardiff University or one of the English, Scottish or Northern Irish Russell Group institutions. In individual local authorities, this figure ranges from 72.1% (Neath Port Talbot) to 87.2% (Blaenau Gwent). These figures are reassuring; three quarters of high achieving students go on to study in Russell Group universities. Where this proportion is slightly below average, for example in Neath Port Talbot, the destination data shows a reasonable explanation for this: a higher proportion of Neath Port Talbot students attend a Welsh university outside the Russell Group, namely Swansea University which is both geographically close, and a highly rated institution.

Annex B identifies the proportions of high achieving students who remain in Wales to study in higher education. As might be expected, there is some regional variation with local authorities closer to the English border reporting lower rates of students remaining in Wales. There are notable exceptions to this, for example the Isle of Anglesey has a below average proportion of students remaining in Wales to study. Equally, areas which are further from the border in either distance or travel time report higher levels of students remaining in Wales. This is by no means a cause for concern: when read alongside the data presented in the previous paragraph we know that a large number of these students will end up studying in Cardiff University, an excellent higher education destination.

## **Conclusions**

This appears to be a positive picture. Three quarters of Welsh high achievers attend Russell Group universities, and geography appears not to be a prohibitive factor in making this decision. We know from the paper published alongside this one “Welsh attainment and admission to Oxford and Cambridge: the evidence base”, that Welsh students do not progress to Oxford and Cambridge in the expected levels. As these high achieving students are attending higher tariff courses in other excellent universities, we must explore in greater detail the reasons behind the lack of success in Welsh Oxford and Cambridge admissions.



## Annex A: Destinations of Welsh high achievers in 2008–13 by local authority

Domicile	Institution Group	6 year total	6 year average	% to Cardiff	% to other RG	% other in Wales	% other in UK
Blaenau Gwent	Cardiff	21	3.5				
Blaenau Gwent	Other	3	0.5				
Blaenau Gwent	Other Welsh	3	0.5				
Blaenau Gwent	Russell Group	20	3.3				
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>44.7%</b>	<b>42.6%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>
Bridgend	Cardiff	83	13.8				
Bridgend	Other	51	8.5				
Bridgend	Other Welsh	27	4.5				
Bridgend	Russell Group	136	22.7				
<b>Bridgend</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>49.5</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>45.8%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>
Caerphilly	Cardiff	106	17.7				
Caerphilly	Other	38	6.3				
Caerphilly	Other Welsh	19	3.2				
Caerphilly	Russell Group	99	16.5				
<b>Caerphilly</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>40.5%</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>7.3%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>
Cardiff	Cardiff	214	35.7				
Cardiff	Other	187	31.2				
Cardiff	Other Welsh	36	6.0				
Cardiff	Russell Group	839	139.8				
<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1276</b>	<b>212.7</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>65.8%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>
Carmarthenshire	Cardiff	163	27.2				
Carmarthenshire	Other	68	11.3				
Carmarthenshire	Other Welsh	48	8.0				
Carmarthenshire	Russell Group	252	42.0				

<b>Carmarthenshire</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>88.5</b>	<b>30.7%</b>	<b>47.5%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>
Ceredigion	Cardiff	53	8.8				
Ceredigion	Other	27	4.5				
Ceredigion	Other Welsh	19	3.2				
Ceredigion	Russell Group	115	19.2				
<b>Ceredigion</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>53.7%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>
Conwy	Cardiff	26	4.3				
Conwy	Other	31	5.2				
Conwy	Other Welsh	11	1.8				
Conwy	Russell Group	160	26.7				
<b>Conwy</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>70.2%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>13.6%</b>
Denbighshire	Cardiff	33	5.5				
Denbighshire	Other	36	6.0				
Denbighshire	Other Welsh	7	1.2				
Denbighshire	Russell Group	120	20.0				
<b>Denbighshire</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>61.2%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>18.4%</b>
Flintshire	Cardiff	22	3.7				
Flintshire	Other	48	8.0				
Flintshire	Other Welsh	3	0.5				
Flintshire	Russell Group	220	36.7				
<b>Flintshire</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>48.8</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>75.1%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>
Gwynedd	Cardiff	81	13.5				
Gwynedd	Other	27	4.5				
Gwynedd	Other Welsh	55	9.2				
Gwynedd	Russell Group	153	25.5				
<b>Gwynedd</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>25.6%</b>	<b>48.4%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>
Isle of Anglesey	Cardiff	27	4.5				
Isle of Anglesey	Other	26	4.3				

Isle of Anglesey	Other Welsh	10	1.7				
Isle of Anglesey	Russell Group	93	15.5				
<b>Isle of Anglesey</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>59.6%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>
Merthyr Tydfil	Cardiff	14	2.3				
Merthyr Tydfil	Other	9	1.5				
Merthyr Tydfil	Other Welsh	3	0.5				
Merthyr Tydfil	Russell Group	37	6.2				
<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>58.7%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
Monmouthshire	Cardiff	63	10.5				
Monmouthshire	Other	69	11.5				
Monmouthshire	Other Welsh	8	1.3				
Monmouthshire	Russell Group	330	55.0				
<b>Monmouthshire</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>13.4%</b>	<b>70.2%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>
Neath Port Talbot	Cardiff	90	15.0				
Neath Port Talbot	Other	51	8.5				
Neath Port Talbot	Other Welsh	28	4.7				
Neath Port Talbot	Russell Group	114	19.0				
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>40.3%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>
Newport	Cardiff	97	16.2				
Newport	Other	54	9.0				
Newport	Other Welsh	10	1.7				
Newport	Russell Group	233	38.8				
<b>Newport</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>65.7</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>59.1%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>13.7%</b>
Pembrokeshire	Cardiff	82	13.7				
Pembrokeshire	Other	53	8.8				
Pembrokeshire	Other Welsh	10	1.7				
Pembrokeshire	Russell Group	146	24.3				
<b>Pembrokeshire</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>28.2%</b>	<b>50.2%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>

Powys	Cardiff	70	11.7				
Powys	Other	77	12.8				
Powys	Other Welsh	31	5.2				
Powys	Russell Group	256	42.7				
<b>Powys</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>72.3</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	<b>59.0%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>17.7%</b>
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Cardiff	108	18.0				
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Other	48	8.0				
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Other Welsh	29	4.8				
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Russell Group	154	25.7				
<b>Rhondda, Cynon, Taff</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>56.5</b>	<b>31.9%</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>14.2%</b>
Swansea	Cardiff	132	22.0				
Swansea	Other	110	18.3				
Swansea	Other Welsh	73	12.2				
Swansea	Russell Group	399	66.5				
<b>Swansea</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>119.0</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>55.9%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>
Torfaen	Cardiff	47	7.8				
Torfaen	Other	29	4.8				
Torfaen	Other Welsh	10	1.7				
Torfaen	Russell Group	71	11.8				
<b>Torfaen</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>29.9%</b>	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>
Vale of Glamorgan	Cardiff	106	17.7				
Vale of Glamorgan	Other	108	18.0				
Vale of Glamorgan	Other Welsh	18	3.0				
Vale of Glamorgan	Russell Group	366	61.0				
<b>Vale of Glamorgan</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>61.2%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>18.1%</b>
Wrexham	Cardiff	36	6.0				
Wrexham	Other	46	7.7				
Wrexham	Other Welsh	6	1.0				

Wrexham	Russell Group	203	33.8				
<b>Wrexham</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>69.8%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>23.2%</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>

## Annex B: Proportions of Welsh high-achieving students who study in Wales

Domicile	% stay in Wales
Blaenau Gwent	51.1%
Bridgend	37.0%
Caerphilly	47.7%
Cardiff	19.6%
Carmarthenshire	39.7%
Ceredigion	33.6%
Conwy	16.2%
Denbighshire	20.4%
Flintshire	8.5%
Gwynedd	43.0%
Isle of Anglesey	23.7%
Merthyr Tydfil	27.0%
Monmouthshire	15.1%
Neath Port Talbot	41.7%
Newport	27.2%
Pembrokeshire	31.6%
Powys	23.3%
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	40.4%
Swansea	28.7%
Torfaen	36.3%
Vale of Glamorgan	20.7%
Wrexham	14.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.4%</b>