

This topic addresses: Building densities and layout, Greenfield land, the Green Belt and knowledge-based jobs.

SA Objective:

4. To **meet local housing needs** by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home.

11. To achieve sustainable inclusive **economic growth**, including the development and expansion of a diverse and knowledge-based economy and the culture/leisure/ visitor sector

SEA Theme: Population and material assets.

Introduction

Oxford is a world-renowned brand for educational excellence, principally because of the historic University of Oxford and also due to the highly respected Oxford Brookes University. It is as a result of this reputation that Oxford derives much of its high profile and prosperity. In December 2019 there were 24,510 students at the University of Oxford and 16,673 students at Oxford Brookes. In addition to this, Oxford's reputation attracts tourists, language students, publishing businesses, spin-out university enterprises and medical research. The city also has students studying at other institutions, and a number of short-term students who visit the universities and language schools.

The demand for student accommodation places two main forms of pressure on the local housing stock:

- From students accommodated directly in private rented housing; and
- From student accommodation being developed on sites that may equally be suitable for other types of housing

An additional consequence of a high student population can be the perceived or actual harmful impacts on the host community or neighbourhood. The large numbers of summer school and foreign language students accommodated in the city – at least during non-Covid times - can also impact on public transport and the city centre environment.

Plans Policies and Programmes

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF (February 2019) requires Local Authorities to consider student accommodation within their assessment of local housing needs. Paragraph 60¹ states that “to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing needs assessment”. Within this context, paragraph 61 notes that students are one of the groups whose need for housing in terms of size, type and tenure should be assessed and reflected in planning policies.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/5-delivering-a-sufficient-supply-of-homes>

National Planning Policy Guidance

The final bullet point of paragraph 017 (reference ID 2a-021-20160401) of the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) published in February 2019 states that;

“Local planning authorities should plan for sufficient student accommodation whether it consists of communal halls of residence or self-contained dwellings, and whether or not it is on campus. Student housing provided by private landlords is often a lower-cost form of housing. Encouraging more dedicated student accommodation may provide low cost housing that takes pressure off the private rented sector and increases the overall housing stock. Plan makers are encouraged to consider options which would support both the needs of the student population as well as local residents before imposing caps or restrictions on students living outside of university-provided accommodation. Plan makers should engage with universities and other higher educational establishments to better understand their student accommodation requirements.”

Paragraph 042-3-042-201800913 of the NPPF allows for student accommodation to be counted towards the housing requirement for a district, based upon the amount of accommodation it releases from the housing market:

“All student accommodation, whether it consists of communal halls of residence or self-contained dwellings, and whether or not it is on campus, can be included towards the housing requirement, based on the amount of accommodation it releases in the housing market. Notwithstanding, local authorities should take steps to avoid double-counting.”

As well as making plain the need for Local Planning Authorities to consider student accommodation within the wider housing context, the NPPF also requires authorities to liaise with the relevant universities where a policy cap or restriction is proposed (as has been the case in Oxford City Council).

Local Plan 2036

The adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036 has policies H8 and H9 which address the provision of student accommodation, with a view to ensure student accommodation is built in appropriate areas to minimise impact on communities and also to minimise pressure on the local housing stock by student demand. H8 allows new student accommodation only on or adjacent to existing campus, academic and hospital sites and in the city centre or district centres. This recognises that it is important to locate student accommodation in a way that avoids changes in character and great increases in activity along quieter residential streets.

Policy H9 aims to reduce pressure on the city’s private rental market by linking new or redeveloped university *academic* accommodation to the delivery of associated *residential* accommodation. It requires the number of students living outside of university-provided accommodation to stay below set thresholds

- University of Oxford: the number of their full-time taught course students living in Oxford in non- university- provided accommodation should not exceed 2,500 at the time of the application. This threshold will be reduced to 1,500 at 01 April 2022.
- Oxford Brookes University: The number of their full-time taught course students living in Oxford in non- university- provided accommodation should not exceed 4,000 at the time of the application. This threshold will be increased to 4,500 if specified criteria are met.

Planning permission will not be granted for new academic facilities if the numbers of full-time students living outside of university-provided accommodation exceeds these thresholds: all applications for net increases in academic floor space are assessed on this basis. The policy also restricts occupation of new student accommodation to students in full-time education on courses of an academic year or more. The policy does not have latitude for other short term uses (e.g. conferences, summer schools) outside of university term time.

The policy threshold is set based on evidence about existing student numbers, expected changes in the student population and information about new student accommodation likely to come forward.

This approach to managing pressures of students on the housing market is long-standing. Core Strategy Policy CS25 of the previously adopted Local Plan requires each university to have no more than 3,000 full-time students living in Oxford outside of university-provided accommodation. This policy approach was developed and has been annually reviewed with the Universities through the monitoring and plan review processes and liaison meetings.

Current situation

University of Oxford

Table 1 shows the number of students attending Oxford University, which are likely to require accommodation outside the University.

Table 1: University of Oxford's student numbers 2016/17 – 2019/20

Monitoring year	Total Number of Students	Students needing accommodation in Oxford	Units of University provided student accommodation
2016/17	23,179	17,753	14,976
2017/18	23,975	18,221	15,047
2018/19	24,289	18,112	15,409
2019/20	24,510	18,413	16,299

This excludes from the total cohort: students with a term-time address outside of the city; students living within the city prior to entry onto a course; visiting students; part-time students; postgraduate research students past year four/assumed to be writing up theses; students working full time for the NHS (DClinPsc Students); specific course exclusions; students who are also members of staff; students living with their parents and students on a year abroad.

As of 1 December 2019, there were 16,299 accommodation places provided across the collegiate University². This leaves a total of 2,114 students living outside of university provided accommodation in Oxford, which is below the threshold of where Policy H9 is set (Figure 1).

² https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7416/annual_monitoring_report_2019-2020 (Paragraph 3.47)

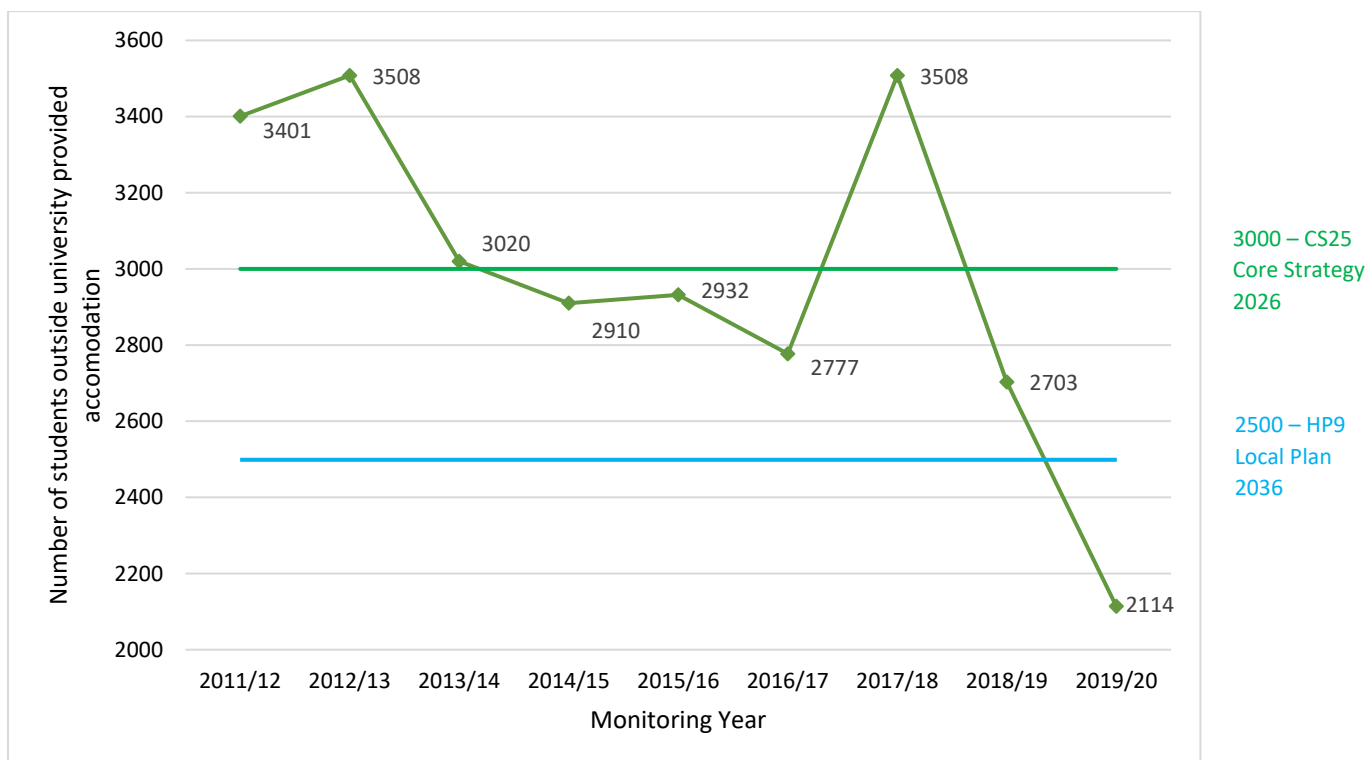


Figure 1: University of Oxford students living outside of university provided accommodation 2011/12-2019/20

Additionally, at the 1st of December 2019 there were also 523 student accommodation places under construction across the collegiate University and extant planning permissions for a further 402 student accommodation places³.

Oxford Brookes University

Table 2 shows the number of students attending Oxford Brookes University which are likely to require accommodation outside the University. This excludes: part-time students; students studying at franchise institutions; students studying outside Oxford (i.e. Swindon campus); placement students away from the university; and students living at home or outside of Oxford.

Table 2: Oxford Brookes University's student numbers 2016/17 – 2019/20

Monitoring year	Total Number of Students	Students needing accommodation in Oxford	Units of University provided student accommodation
2016/17	17,069	9,504	5,324
2017/18	16,988	9,494	5,405
2018/19	16,579	9,360	5,281
2019/20	16,673	9,759	5,914

The overall number of students studying at the Oxford Brookes University continues to be relatively static. There are in fact around 500 fewer individuals studying at the University now when compared to the figures for 2015/16 when the national student cap was removed. However, as noted in the Oxford Local Plan 2036, an increased proportion of undergraduate, full-time students and those joining from outside of the county in recent years has driven an increase in demand for accommodation with Oxford.

³ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7416/annual_monitoring_report_2019-2020 (Paragraph 3.48)

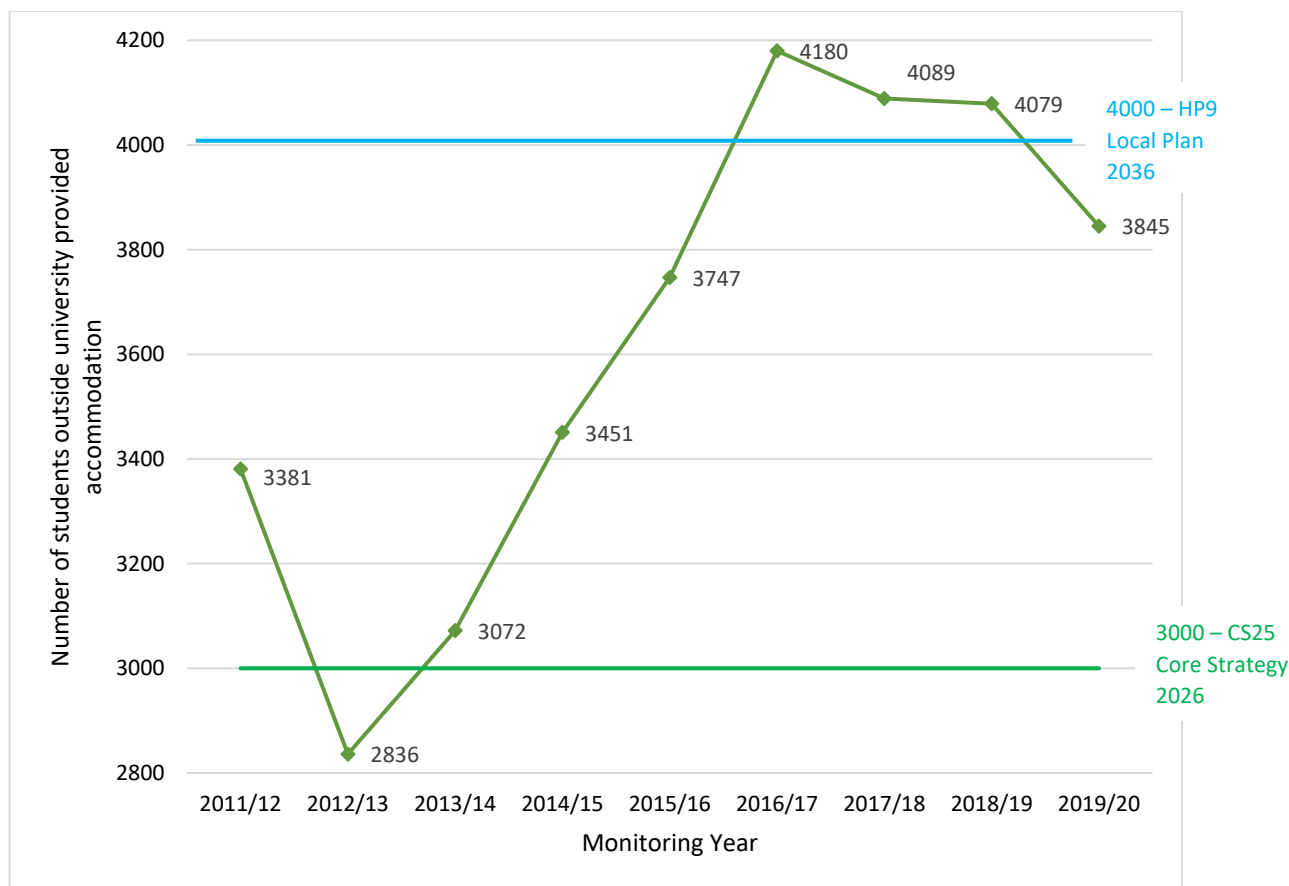


Figure 2: Oxford Brookes students living outside of university provided accommodation 2011/12 – 2019/20

When compared to 2018/2019, there was a reduction of 234 Oxford Brookes students living outside of university provided accommodation in the city in 2019/20. A significant reason for the reduction was the opening of the Parade Green hall of residence. This new development also helped to offset the removal of existing provision, such as the continued redevelopment of Paul Kent Halls and rooms across sites which are no longer fit for purpose. However, Oxford Brookes University has acknowledged that the number of students living outside of university provided accommodation within the 2019/20 monitoring period again exceeded the threshold⁴ (Figure 2).

Many UK universities have taken the opportunity to significantly increase their student numbers since the removal of this cap. Oxford Brookes' ongoing commitment in relation to the number of students living in the community is an important factor in this not being the case at the University. Oxford Brookes will continue to work with the council and key stakeholders to ensure that appropriate student accommodation can be developed. The University plans to further increase its student accommodation capacity, within existing land owned by the University. If planning application activity is successful, this will help to further reduce the number of Oxford Brookes students living outside of University accommodation, and in meeting the city's threshold.

The overall trend in student numbers pre-Covid shows a small increase over the past few years in overall student numbers at both Universities (+435 for Oxford and +600 at Brookes from 2014/15 to 2019/20) as can be seen below in Figure 3. The number of accommodation places provided by the universities however is also increasing over time, but at a faster rate (+1503 at Oxford and +876 at

⁴ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7416/annual_monitoring_report_2019-2020 (Paragraph 3.52)

Brookes from 2014/15 to 2019/20), resulting in the general downward trends in students which require accommodation outside of the Universities (Figures 1 and 2). If the delivery of student accommodation continues to outpace the growth of the student population at the Universities, the overall strain on the local housing market from students will continue to be reduced.

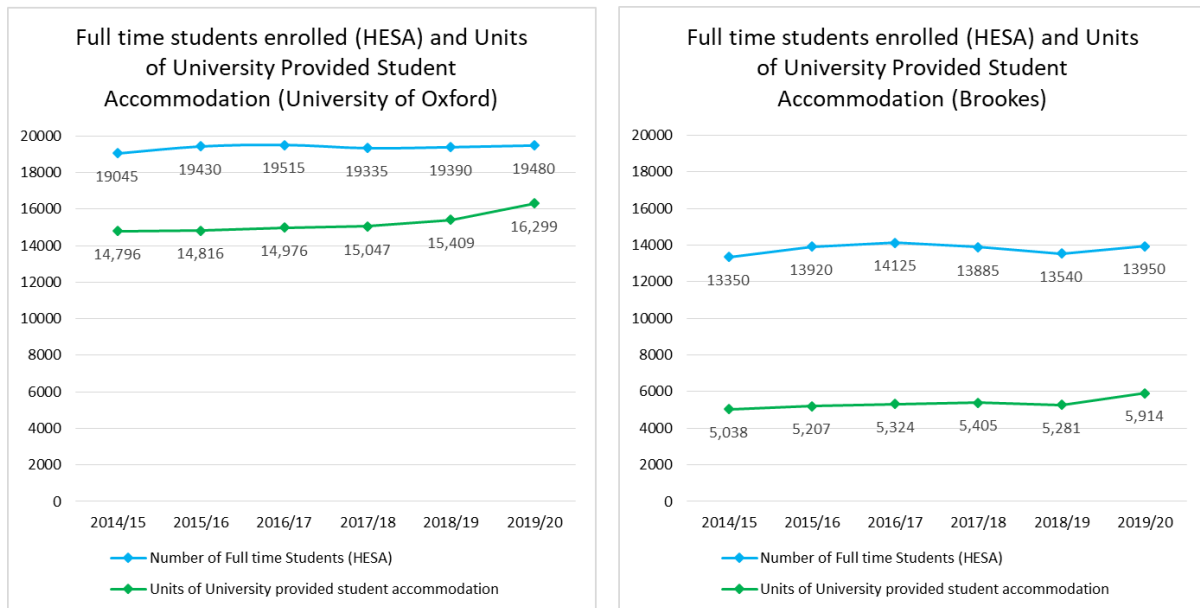


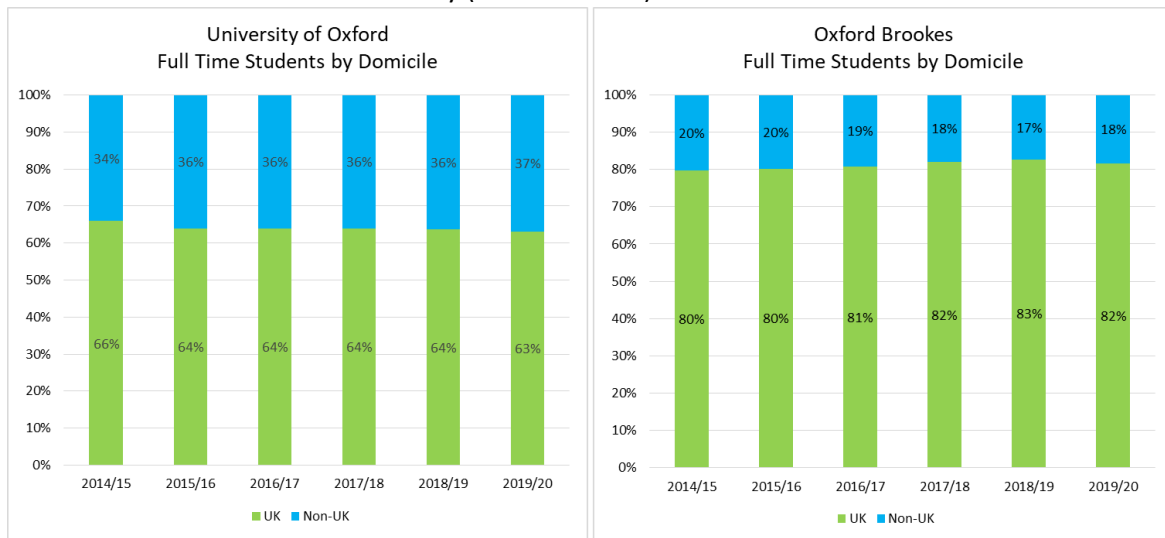
Figure 3: Number of full time students and number of university provided student accommodation places at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University

Other Purpose Built Student Accommodation

It is important to note that the two universities are not the only institutions that attracting students to Oxford. There is a demand to accommodate students from language schools and other academic organisations which also puts pressure on the private rental market. This is addressed and limited by Policy H8 of the currently adopted plan where permissions for student accommodation will only be accepted for full time students enrolled in courses of one academic year or more. The potential lasting effects of Brexit and Covid-19 on this market are unknown.

As can be seen in figure 4, the proportion of full time international students steadily makes up more than a third of the total full-time student cohort each year for the University of Oxford and around a fifth of the student cohort for Oxford Brookes University. The proportion of non-UK students shows an increasing trend for Oxford University and a slight decrease for Oxford Brookes

Figure 4: Proportion of Full-time students by Domicile (UK and International) at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University (Source: HESA⁵).



Other students with accommodation needs

The globally-recognised “Oxford” brand has encouraged the establishment of a large number of privately run colleges and language schools in Oxford. These institutions run a variety of courses including summer language schools for young teenagers, GCSE and GCE courses and university entrance preparation programmes. Courses may take place throughout the academic year or within the main academic holidays and typically are away from the student’s home requiring accommodation to be provided by the institution or found by the student. Many of these students are on short-term courses, often in the educational vacations, when they may be housed in university accommodation. Many are also housed in ‘homestay’ accommodation. These are often younger students as opposed to adult (18+) students. Data on the overall numbers, ages and lengths of stay of these students is not readily available and the population of these students will vary widely throughout the year. Consequent to the growth of these institutions, in the confined space available within Oxford, there has been a loss of B1 space (for teaching and administration activities) and additional pressure within the accommodation market.

Likely trends without a new local plan

Policies of OLP36 will continue to apply until 2036 or until they are deemed out of date, from which point, without a new local plan national guidance would be used to determine applications.

Impacts of COVID-19

The global Covid-19 pandemic has impacted universities adversely, with restrictions on international travel affecting the enrolment of international students, with an estimated 47% expected to defer their education at university or reconsider their options altogether due to uncertainties associated with Covid-19.⁶

The University of Oxford has a distinct teaching style with focussed tutorials in small groups. During the pandemic, considerable changes had to be made to this teaching style. Tutorials, lectures and all means of learning moved online and most students vacated their accommodation, with 6 out of 10

⁶ <https://londoneconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-university-finances-april-2020/>

students reported that they were moving home to live with parents during lockdown. Nationally, low rates of student satisfaction have been reported, particularly with the social experience of university in isolation⁷.

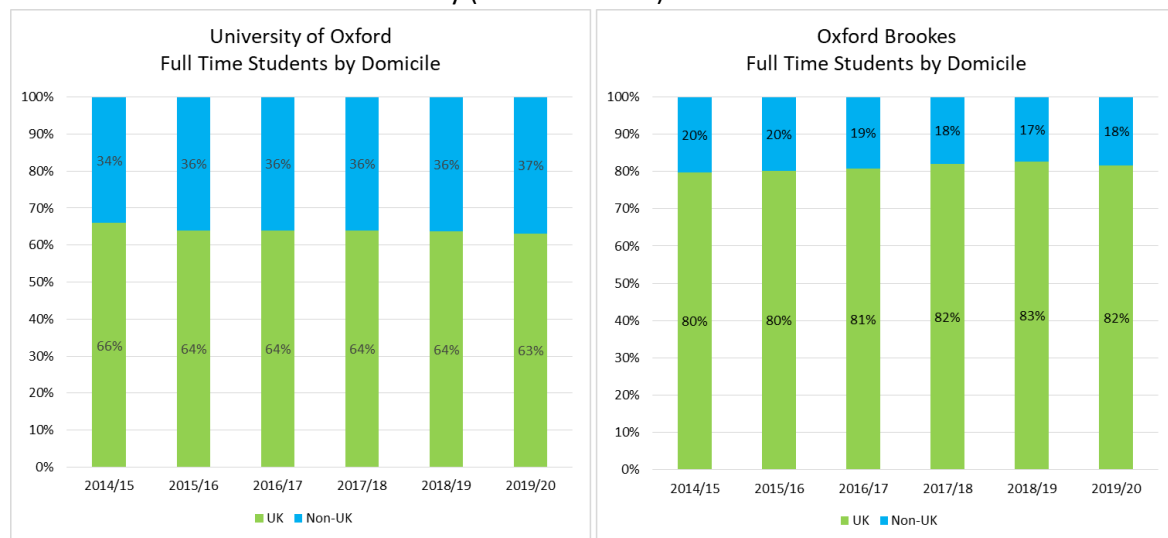
It is difficult to know what the lasting impacts will be, but London Economics were commissioned by the University and College Union to consider the immediate potential impacts on UK higher education institutions' finances⁸. This also looked at knock-on impacts for the wider economy. It estimated that the pandemic would be expected to result in a decline in UK economic output of approximately £6.1 billion, as well as a total of 63,000 job losses. This was from a direct reduction in university income and expenditure combined with the subsequent indirect and induced 'ripple effects' throughout university supply chains and the wider economy.

On May 17th 2021, Covid-19 restrictions in the UK were relaxed and Oxford's universities are resuming face-to-face teaching and tutorials alongside online teaching for lectures and large groups.⁹ However, it remains to be seen what the situation will be for students when term resumes in Autumn 2021, and how lasting the impacts will be, particularly in terms of the reduction in numbers of international students

Impacts of Brexit

As can be seen in Figure 4, the proportion of full time international students steadily makes up more than a third of the total full-time student cohort each year for the University of Oxford and around a fifth of the student cohort for Oxford Brookes University. The proportion of non-UK students shows an increasing trend for Oxford University and a slight decrease for Oxford Brookes

Figure 4: Proportion of Full-time students by Domicile (UK and International) at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University (Source: HESA¹⁰).



⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandtheimpactonstudentsinhighereducationinenglandseptembertodecember2020/2020-12-21>

⁸ <https://londoneconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-university-finances-april-2020/>

⁹ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus/status>

¹⁰ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students>

Brexit means that new systems are in place for becoming an EU national studying in the UK, which started on 1st January 2021. The EU Settlement Scheme does not apply anymore, except to those already living in the UK before 31st December 2020. To study in the UK for up to 6 months does not require a visa as long as the course is at an accredited institution. To study on courses up to 11 months a short-term study visa is needed. Otherwise, student visas or child student visas need to be applied for. This does not previously seem to have prevented students from outside the EU enrolling on courses. At the moment it will be difficult to separate out impacts of Covid and Brexit. Over time the impacts may depend on the difficulty of obtaining visas and how off-putting that may be.

Options for the new Local Plan

It is clear from the NPPF that the local plan will need to assess the need for student accommodation and reflect this in its planning policies. The Oxford Local Plan 2036 was supported by an assessment of student housing demand and supply¹¹. Such an assessment is likely to be difficult to undertake at the current time because the need for student accommodation in the short, medium and long term will be very uncertain. It does seem to be the case that the universities will resume full teaching in person as soon as possible, with students on campus. However, this may be delayed for some international students. The situation for private language colleges and similar institutions is more uncertain because of current restrictions on international travel and also potential lasting global economic impacts. Whilst a new assessment will be required to support the new Local Plan it is likely to be worth waiting a little longer until the situation settles before commencing this work.

Conclusion

Housing is a social need, so it is important to try to provide housing for those in need of housing. Due to the significant numbers of students in Oxford it is important to consider their accommodation and housing needs carefully. Housing students in purpose built accommodation can help to free up other housing types, leaving more available on the general market for others in the community. However land that could be used for student accommodation is also likely to be suitable for the delivery of general housing and as such a delicate balance must be struck. Students can be accommodated in many ways, and how students are housed has other social consequences. For example, housing students in unsuitable locations could lead to local difficulties in the community with possible perceptions of anti-social behaviour within the community, and could also lead to students feeling isolated and not fully part of the city.

Attracting students is essential for the success of the universities. Provision of affordable accommodation for students is part of what the universities can offer. The universities make a significant economic contribution to the city and beyond and also carry out important research and development, which in turn has a social impact.

Sustainability/Plan issues

- The Plan should assess and respond to the need for student accommodation
- The links between provision of student accommodation and other types of housing should be considered when developing policies

¹¹ [https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/5685/eco19 - assessment of student housing demand and supply for oxford city council](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/5685/eco19_-_assessment_of_student_housing_demand_and_supply_for_oxford_city_council)

- The potential implications of student location in different locations, for students, neighbourhoods and in terms of delivering sufficient housing of the right type should be considered