OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE ENTRY
2018

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Careers Department
Oxford and Cambridge - Why bother?

- Quality of resources
- Quality of teaching
- Support for students

NOT

- My aunt went there
- I want to be in Footlights
- Social cachet
- It’s so pretty etc.
Oxford and Cambridge - Why Not?

- **Early application** – can they really be sure by early September?
- **Interviews** – how might the student feel about these?
- **Course availability** – is the right course actually available, e.g., joint honours, specialisation, etc?
- **Course structure** – is the structure of the course the right one?
- **Qualifications** – will they be sufficient? Are these the right subjects? Can they confidently get the grades? Are the right grade predictions going to be available (and then the right grades)?
Entry is based on the overall UCAS application.

There must be:

- An **appropriate** range of **FIVE** choices
- A **well structured** and **persuasive** personal statement
- A **carefully completed** application

These will be started in June/July once the system opens up.
Principal differences to “ordinary” applications

- **Early Applications**
- **Even higher demand** – intense competition – even good candidates struggle

- **Additional “hurdles”**
  - Further Online Forms (Cambridge)
  - Personal statements which might be for contrasting subjects
  - Tests
  - Interviews
  - Pooling
Last year’s Oxford and Cambridge Entry timeline

- **Enrolment meeting**: Was on 7th Sept 9am
- **UCAS / Oxbridge MVD forms (Internal)**: 19th Sept
- **Oxford/Cambridge forms (Internal)**: 28th Sept
- **Oxford & Cambridge Tests**: BMAT, HAT, etc. First Weds of 2nd half term in November [other tests the following week]
- **FORMS WITH UNIS**: 15th Oct
- **Samples of Work 10th Nov**: (Oxon sooner for Cambridge)
- **Oxford and Cambridge Interviews**: Needed to be kept CLEAR
- **Cambridge Winter Pool Interviews**
- **12 days**
- **September**: Teaching Began 12th Sept
- **October**: Half Term was 21-31st Oct
- **November**: End of Term was 16th Dec
- **December**: Jan 2017
This year

- Upper Sixth Enrolment is being planned to take place at the end of the summer term

  **BUT**

- The Oxford/Cambridge/Medicine/etc deadline remains at 15\textsuperscript{th} October and therefore...

- The college deadline is therefore very early at 18\textsuperscript{th} September

- References and personal statements are potentially even more important with the loss of AS results for students
Reference writing is complex and takes time and care

This also assumes that there are no errors on the initial application, and that no improvements might be suggested once submitted.
Oxford Entry – Some Specifics

- Tests in various subjects taken in College
  - BMAT
  - History
  - English
  - Maths
  - Computer Science
  - Physics
  - Classics
  - Geography
  - PPE etc

- **LNAT test** for Law taken with Pearson Vue (as with the Driving Theory test)

- **Examples of completed work** – usually requested – to be there by **10th November**

- **Interview “week”** (2-3 days?) including possible pool – dates are published on their site
Oxford Entry – Some Specifics

- Offers have been made this year from AAA to A*AA or A*A*A at A level.
- The UCAS form combined with tests pre-screened students – removing several of our applicants before interview week – in the past this has been as many as 1/3 or more.
- Oxford expect AS A grades and GCSE A* grades as a norm among their applicants (although this will be flagged against school averages).
- Traditionally there has been a greater emphasis on GCSE at Oxford than Cambridge.
Cambridge Entry – Some Specifics

- Offers have been no less than A*AA at A level – and several at A*A*A
- Some colleges might look for 4 A levels for some subjects (e.g., Churchill College and Law)
- An additional Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ) needed to be completed online
- Examples of completed work are requested, often with a with a tighter deadline than Oxford
- Interviews are spread through December
- A possible winter pool in early January may rely either on existing records or require a further interview
- Formerly using AS grades and individual UMS scores, Cambridge have now adopted tests like Oxford’s for most subjects
Cambridge Entry – tests

- In addition to
  - Cambridge’s own Law test (not LNAT)
  - BMAT for Medicine
  - TSA Cambridge taken by only one remaining subject

- This is the new test regime:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses with pre-interview written assessments</th>
<th>Courses with at-interview written assessments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic</td>
<td>Archaeology*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian and Middle Eastern Studies</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Engineering</td>
<td>Classics (3-year and 4-year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>History of Art</td>
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<td>Geography</td>
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</table>
What Are They Looking at?

AS Grades/UMS scores
GCSE results
Interview Performance
The Personal Statement
Specific Course Requirements
Sample Work
The Reference
A level predictions
Specialist test results
And then …
Meeting their conditional offer
What Are They Looking for?

- **Enthusiasm** for the subject
- **Knowledge** of the subject as an indicator of potential
- **Intellectual interest and initiative**
- The **confidence and capacity** to respond to demands of tutorial/supervision systems
- Evidence of **forethought and research**
- Relevant **work experience**, etc. where necessary
- Two key recurrent phrases:
  - “self-motivated learner”
  - “teachability”
The difference between extra-curricular and super-curricular activities

Extra-Curricular

- Taken outside of regular academic work.
- May show:
  - A better more rounded personality
  - An ability to juggle a wide range of intellectual interests
  - An ability to manage time effectively between a variety of commitments

Super-Curricular

- All of the preceding but also demonstrates
  - An improvement of the grasp of the subject beyond the demands of the A level syllabus
  - A desire and ability to take the subject beyond the materials and work provided by your teachers
  - Demonstrate convincingly that the applicant is a self-motivated learner in this discipline and is teachable
My Role

- I attempt to support applications and applicants
- I also attempt to provide realistic guidance
- I take a hand in the administration of forms etc

**BUT I CAN NOT**

- Allow or forbid an application
- Provide everything needed
- Definitively tell students
  - Which college
  - Which subject
  - What reading
- Nor can I liaise with *everyone* in the process at all times
What Can Applicants Do?

- Read around the subject – undergraduate students are primarily readers (in Arts and Humanities especially)
- Consider college choices – although open applications are fine
- Gather information from websites, Open Days, etc
- Take advantage of public lectures, courses, summer schools etc as available
- Find any possible work experience or shadowing (especially Law, Teaching, Med, etc), however related and other supercurricular activities again as available

FOCUS ON

- The skills required for the course – to be a successful historian, chemist, etc and how they might be demonstrated through evidence
- College choices and how they reflect aspirations and meet the skill set required. This may usefully include an EPQ
- Reading and pursuing an academic topic. Going beyond the syllabus
Some useful books specific to Oxbridge Candidates
Beware of Guides that…

- Offer ready made personal statements
- Offer clever ways of “getting round” admissions tests or interviews
- Offer practice questions for admissions tests that might bear no relationship to the real thing
- Offer further, often expensive courses to prepare you for entry
- Are out of date in the face of exam reforms
(Semi-official) Guidance on:

- University structure
- Courses available
- Colleges and College choice
- Other issues – e.g., the usefulness or otherwise of specific A levels...

NB 2014 version...
Some essential websites for Oxbridge Candidates

- www.ox.ac.uk – Oxford University
- www.cam.ac.uk – Cambridge University
- www.admissionstests.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/adt – for potential BMAT and TSA entries
- www.lnat.ac.uk – for potential law students
- www.ucas.com – for all applicants
- www.godalming.ac.uk
College Careers site

Available to all students on roll
College Careers – Oxbridge and Aim High site

Email – dak@godalming.ac.uk

Available to anyone who registers with us
Godalming Online Careers - Oxbridge contains:

- Advice and guidance on making choices
- Media feeds from and about each university
- Details on some open days, competitions, master classes, scholarships, etc that come through the Careers Department
- Links to some of the key parts of the main university sites, to other universities, the Russell Group, etc
- Forums and contact points for help. etc
Some questions asked by students [in no particular order]
• **Can I apply to both Oxford and Cambridge at the same time?**
  - No – only one application to one of these universities in any given year is allowed.

• **Do I have to have all A* at GCSE?**
  - No – GCSE performance will be assessed against the school's overall success rate. However, if there is a more specific reason for underperformance in GCSE then this needs to be explained elsewhere on the application. More important by far is progress over this year and next. However, with uncertainties at A level this may be becoming more important to both universities.

• **Do I need 4 A levels?**
  - Except for Maths (when including Further Maths) generally not. But other universities may require more than three. There is increasing pressure from a few Cambridge Colleges to change this situation.
• **Did I have to go on the Epsom Trip to apply?**
  
  • No – but…
  
  • The trip may have been very useful, particularly if deciding between related disciplines or to chat with students and admissions tutors.
  
  • It has been an excellent starting point for some when planning open days and other activities
  
  • Other activities and opportunities are available from the universities and through this college

• **Do AS exams matter?**

  • They matter. There is less trust in grade predictions than ever before. *All* evidence of academic attainment will be used.
  
  • You need the highest possible grades at AS.
• Will the DofE scheme help?
  • Not here specifically, unless it can be used in the personal statement to demonstrate other things – e.g., the ability to cope under pressure (useful in Medicine, less so in English Literature). The Personal Statement needs evidence not just assertion.
  • BUT other universities value this sort of activity far more – and you will be applying elsewhere as well.

• Is a gap year a good idea?
  • Possibly. Oxford and Cambridge prefer deferred entry candidates to apply in the year off. However, Maths should be considered completely off-limits subject for a gap year.
  • Gap years can be of immense benefit for you to grow as a person. It’s not (or should not be) all about ticking boxes on a university application.
• **Are some Colleges easier to get into than others?**
  
  • This might be so, but statistics will give no indication – what may be a less popular college becomes an easier one another year (especially among candidates who spend too much time reading statistics!).
  
  • Consider entry routes though. Is the college that does not ask for an extra essay or test likely to be the least popular? And might not the test/essay give an extra chance to prove your worth?
  
  • Both universities claim that pooling systems should mean that every candidate has an equal chance of entry – and many do not end up in their first choice. Oxford’s pooling system may be slightly more efficient than Cambridge’s.
  
  • AND overseas student will be applying for the colleges they’ve seen on the postcards…
  
• **Should I apply for an easier course and then transfer to a popular one?**
  
  • A terrible idea – the tutors who interview will be able to tell pretty quickly whether or not they have a serious candidate for their course.
  
  • However, there is no reason not to give consideration for so-called minority subjects – and if they really do appeal, then make an application.
  
  • This is always providing that your personal statement can somehow match all five ucas choices.
• **Do Oxford and Cambridge cost more than other universities?**

• It has always been a boast of both Oxford and Cambridge that it can be as cheap or cheaper to live there as an undergraduate than other universities. This is helped by, for example,
  - Textbooks being readily available from college and university libraries
  - Social life in the college may be “cheap and cheerful” – like anywhere else
  - Endowments and travel grants which may be available to students

• However, recent developments at Oxford raise concerns. The cost of living in hall, whilst relatively economical, may not be cheap.

• As with other elite universities, it is very possible to get into large amounts of debt quickly. You need to be aware of this in your budgeting.