Oxford and Cambridge Entry

Aim High
- The Aim High programme attempts to identify students who will benefit from the support which these universities can provide and are potential candidates for them
- Support for researching Higher Education options, activities to stretch and challenge able students beyond the A level syllabus and input from existing students and admissions tutors form part of this programme. This will therefore involve ruling various universities and courses as suitable or not for individuals
- It is not essential to have been in any Aim High group to make an application to any university, including Oxford or Cambridge

Cambridge Entry
- Offers are typically A*A*A to A*AA at A level – Cambridge will not consider less
- Additional information form completed online
- Scores on all AS and A2 modules
- Tests
  - BMAT test for Medicine at Godalming
  - Independent Cambridge Law Test
  - Other tests at interview – e.g., Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)
  - STEP also required for Maths
- Examples of completed work
- Interviews spread through December
- Possible pool to mid/late January
- Possible minimum of 85-90% in ALL AS modules
- Very high GCSE scores (but checked against school)
- Veterinary Medicine and other medical students will be expected to have high BMAT scores, Law applicants high LNAT scores, and testing in general - at interview (e.g., the TSA) or after will be rigorous
- A Level “Reform” – Cambridge have not yet finalised their position on this – but this will inevitably change considerably for 2017 entry
At present they favour AS entry for all candidates

Oxford Entry
- Pre-interview tests in various subjects are taken in College including individual subject tests (e.g., History English Maths Computer Science PPE Geography etc – many of which focus on the TSA Thinking Skills test). In addition BMAT tests are also sat in Godalming College but registered and paid for individually.
- The LNAT test for the Law degree is taken with Pearson Vue in local testing centres.
- Likely to request examples of completed work
- Interview week including possible pool
- Offers will vary from A*A*A to AAA at A level – Oxford would not consider less – faculties and subjects vary and individual courses all need to be checked on the Oxford website
- Pre-screened students – usually removing applicants before interview week
- Expect A grades in all AS subjects and very high GCSEs
- NB Very few courses at Oxford do not have a test – this must be checked.

Looking for:
- Enthusiasm for chosen subject
- Knowledge of chosen subject
- Intellectual interest and initiative
- The confidence and capacity to respond to demands of tutorial/supervision systems
- Evidence of forethought and research
- Relevant work experience where necessary
- They want a “self-motivated learner” – someone keen enough to be able to show this degree of motivation – ENTHUSIASM!

Some essential websites for Oxbridge Candidates
- www.ox.ac.uk – Oxford University
- www.cam.ac.uk – Cambridge University
- www.lnat.ac.uk – for potential law students
- www.admissionstestingservice.org/ – for potential BMAT and TSA entries
- www.ucas.com – for all applicants
- www.godalming.ac.uk (especially the Godalming Online site)

Try to become as familiar as you can with the necessary websites – my email dak@godalming.ac.uk
Applicants will need

- An appropriate range of choices
- A persuasive personal statement
- A carefully completed application
- A very early application

To prepare:

- Read – critically and beyond your syllabus requirements
- Consider subject and university / college choice, including “minority” subjects
- Begin drafting a personal statement
- Visit - going to Open Days or other events
- Look at summer schools, taster days, lectures, etc. - super-curricular activities
- Find possible work experience (especially for Law, Teaching, Medicine, etc.)
- Carefully consider choices for A2 and Additional Studies

Some Questions Asked by Students

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. Most important by far is progress over this year and next.

Do I need 4 A levels?

Except for Maths (when including Further Maths) generally not. But other universities (see University of London) may require more than three. This could change – see Law at Churchill College.

Do I have to get 90%+ in every module?

It would help – but these universities will be aware that modules can occasionally “go wrong”. There could be a problem if they all do – and you will be competing against students for whom they have not. 90% applies to the highest demand subjects – especially Medicine and Law.

Do they mind retakes?

They would rather you got it right first time. But a retake could show that applicants set themselves high standards. Again, consider the rest of the field. They will be very good indeed and may not have needed them!

Did I have to go on the Epsom Trip to stay on track?

Absolutely not. This year aims to show you how the system works and how to prepare if you need to make an early application. The Epsom Trip may be useful, particularly if deciding between related disciplines or to chat with students and admissions tutors. An example: if considering Medicine – and Medicine alone – then an Open Day would be of more use. The principal focus of this trip is choice between subjects.

Does 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 of your capability. But, other universities value such activities 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. Maths is probably the only completely off-limits subject for a gap year. Gap years can be of immense benefit to 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 varies from Cambridge’s; it is quicker but no pooling system is perfect.

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 this is a serious candidate for their course. However, why not give consideration for so-called minority subjects? And if they really do appeal, then make an application. These departments should also take account of the issue that your personal statement may not quite match all five ucas subject 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 all elite universities, it is quite possible to get into debt quickly. You need to budget anywhere.

DAK rev April 2015