



# OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE ENTRANTS



## ENTRY TO UNIVERSITY 2020

# **WHY OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE?**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Oxford and Cambridge are two of the world's most famous and prestigious universities with long traditions of excellence in teaching and research.

Studying at Oxford or Cambridge provides the opportunity to come into contact with some of the leading researchers in your chosen subject. The Government ranks universities in terms of the quality of their teaching and research. Oxford and Cambridge frequently come at the top in the majority of subjects, although other universities offer well respected and high quality courses, for instance, Imperial College, London pushes Oxford and Cambridge hard in Science and Engineering and some students do not favour the traditional approach of Oxbridge to medicine.

In most subject areas Oxford and Cambridge will offer the best facilities: excellent laboratory and research opportunities, libraries at university, college and department level. Some other universities are catching up rapidly in some subjects, but because Oxford and Cambridge are very wealthy (the result of bequests and donations over a long period of time) they are hard to match. Donations to Cambridge since 1989 have included £16m from Bill Gates for a new computer laboratory, £13m to the Chemistry Department from Unilever and £5m from the Wellcome Trust for the Biochemistry and Clinical Schools. Oxford has received £20m from Wafic Said for a new Business School, £6.2m from Oxford graduate, Rupert Murdoch, for the English Faculty and to finance a visiting professorship in broadcast media, and £75m for bursaries in 2012 from Michael Moritz, a venture capitalist.

The student body at Oxford and Cambridge includes people from a wide range of backgrounds both in this country and abroad. You will be amongst students who share your commitment and enthusiasm for your subject and who match your academic ability. This makes for a very stimulating and exciting mixture of people.

Whilst Oxford and Cambridge offer all the benefits of a large international university, the collegiate system means that you can also live within a small community of students studying a wide range of subjects. Your college also gives you close contact with a tutor in your subject who will guide your learning and get to know you very well.

Your college will offer regular tutorials at Oxford, or supervisions at Cambridge, in which you will get the opportunity for one to one, more usually one to two, teaching from a subject tutor in your college. The typical tutorial is centred around an essay or an exercise which will have been submitted to your tutor beforehand and which will give a focus to a challenging discussion with your tutor. Few other universities can offer this teaching and learning opportunity. It provides you with a challenging learning environment because tutorials give

you a much greater opportunity to articulate your ideas regularly with a leading authority in your field of study.

There can be no doubt that a degree from Oxford or Cambridge will give you an advantage in most career areas. Many of the large employers start recruiting from Oxbridge first. Over 91% of Oxbridge leavers are employed or in further study six months after graduating. They have the lowest drop-out rates of any University – close 1.6-2% compared to the National average of 7.4%. If you have high ambitions, Oxford and Cambridge still play a crucial role in élite recruitment, identifying many of those able undergraduates who will find themselves in high status positions in politics, business, the media and the arts.

# **OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE:**

## **CONFRONTING THE MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES**

### **DO STUDENTS FROM FEE PAYING SCHOOLS GET AN UNFAIR ADVANTAGE?**

The latest figures show that students at Oxford and Cambridge come from a mix of independent and state schools and in 2017 over 58% of the intake to Oxford came from state school pupils. The best independent schools (and they are not all good) do give their students an advantage over the children of parents who cannot afford to send their children to what are usually small schools with good facilities. Many fee-paying schools are able to select from those who can afford to go there (or from those who have been awarded scholarships) and have a disproportionate number of able students. Their students are also more likely to be encouraged to apply to Oxbridge and state school pupils tend to apply for the most oversubscribed subjects. State schools may seem under-represented at Oxbridge, not because of prejudice or discrimination in favour of the independent sector at the point of selection, but simply because many high achievers in state schools do not apply.

When it comes to selection for places at both universities, students are selected on ability whichever types of school they come from and there is no evidence that top independent schools have places reserved for their students as some people still believe. Oxford and Cambridge compete fiercely against each other for the best students and have no interest in recruiting an applicant because of their school or background rather than their ability. Both universities are working very hard to attract more of the able students in state schools who simply do not apply. There were over 20,000 students applying to Oxford and similarly to Cambridge in 2017 and published statistics suggest that overall one in six applicants to Oxford received an offer and one in five offers to those applying to Cambridge. Of those accepted, over 97% achieved A\*AA or better in their A levels. It is also true that a further 4,832 of Cambridge applicants in 2017 with the equivalent of A\*AA or better were unsuccessful in their applications. The application process is undoubtedly competitive.

### **IF I GET A PLACE, WILL I FIT IN?**

Colleges do vary in style, atmosphere and size, so it is important to go to college open days and look at the relevant 'Alternative Prospectus' to get some idea of the differences between colleges. If you do this, there is every chance that you will find a college which will suit your individual needs.

### **WILL I COPE WITH THE PRESSURE?**

Both Oxford and Cambridge take care over their selection and the chances are that if they do offer you a place you will be of the calibre needed to succeed. As one Admissions Tutor put it, "If you get in, you are meant to be there".

### **CAN LIFE AT OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE BE IMPERSONAL AND UNCARING?**

Life can be intense, and you will need to work hard during the term and the vacations, but the tutorial system at Oxford and supervisions at Cambridge mean that you see your tutor regularly.

### **CAN COLLEGE LIFE BE CLAUSTROPHOBIC?**

The college system means that you can live in a smaller community whilst still having the benefit of the facilities of a major university. You can participate in social and sporting activities, clubs and societies at both a college and a university level. For example for those who are outstanding at sport there are opportunities to play at the highest level. For those who simply want to play for fun, college teams offer less competitive opportunities. College life also increases the chance that you will mix with students studying other subjects.

### **ARE SOME OF THE COURSES OLD FASHIONED AND OUT-DATED?**

Oxford and Cambridge do tend to focus on more traditional academic courses. However many of the courses are flexible and allow you to choose a range of options within a particular degree. You will invariably be taught by people who are at the 'cutting edge' of their subjects.

### **DO I HAVE TO BE WELL OFF?**

Living expenses at colleges vary but there is no evidence that living in Oxford and Cambridge is any more expensive than other universities. Added to this, because most of the colleges are wealthy (as the result of bequests and assets such as land and property which they own) there is often more chance to get financial help from hardship funds or other grants than at other universities.

### **IF I GET TO OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE, WILL I BE ABLE TO COMPETE WITH APPLICANTS FROM INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS?**

Too often state school pupils assume that students from independent schools will have an advantage over them at university. Research published in 1998 by Dr Robert McNabb and Dr Sarmisha Pal of Cardiff Business School, together with Professor Peter Sloane of the University of Aberdeen, suggests that once at university, former state school students are certainly not disadvantaged. McNabb, Pal and Sloane studied the progress of 60,000 students who graduated in 1992 and found that:

*"When everyone arrives at university, they are suddenly on a level playing field. Students from comprehensive schools appear to be very motivated and have something extra for a given set of A-levels which enables them to do well. Students with the same A-level grades who come from comprehensives are likely to be more able than those from independent schools possibly because of innate ability or because they are harder working or more motivated".*

The researchers suggest that state school students might have had to struggle harder to get to university and, as a result, were more determined to do well when they got there.

The research also identified two more key points:

- *For students entering university with identical A-level grades, those from state schools on average get better degrees and are less likely to drop out.*
- *State school students were 20% more likely to get first class degrees at the end of their course compared to independent school students who entered university with equivalent A-level grades.*

All of this suggests that students from state schools should have no reason to doubt their ability to compete very favourably with students from the independent sector once they are at university.

# OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

## *SIMILARITIES*

- **Academic and Theoretical Courses:** *Abstract*
- **Application Deadline:** *15 October (every year)*
- **Application – on line**
- **Ratio of applicants to places:** 1 in 5 (Cambridge) 1 in 6 (Oxford)
- **Methods of Selection:**

Interviews: *Potential, Motivation, Individual Merits*

Academic: *GCSE Record, Predicted A Level Grades*

Offer: *Conditional on the basis of A-levels or Equivalent*

Admissions tests: *Specific to the course applied.*

- **Collegiate Universities:** *3 Tier System*

*University*

*Department*

*College*

- **Mitigating circumstances:** Both Oxford and Cambridge will consider extenuating circumstances if performance in examinations has been genuinely affected by mitigating factors.

# OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

## ***DIFFERENCES***

- **Acceptance of Students according to age:**

*Cambridge – No students under 18, except special circumstances*

*Oxford – No rules about age*

- **The Availability of Courses across the Colleges:**

*Cambridge – Available at nearly every college*

*Oxford – Not all colleges offer all subjects*

- **The Nature of the Courses:**

*Cambridge – “Tripos” – flexibility in degree course*

*Oxford – Combinations of subjects*

- **Admissions Tests (31<sup>st</sup> October) sometimes during half term!**
- **Admissions Procedures (deadline – 15 October)**

<b><i>Cambridge</i></b>	<b><i>Oxford</i></b>
<i>All applications through UCAS</i>	<i>All applications through UCAS</i>
<i>January – Pools</i>	<i>December – All interviews</i>
<i>Offers – December/January</i>	<i>Offers - January</i>

## CHOOSING A COLLEGE AT OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE

With 28 colleges at Cambridge and 30 colleges at 6 halls admitting undergraduates at Oxford, the choice of college can appear difficult. Data sharing and applicant redistribution are widely used to even up the chances of success, so the choice may not be as crucial as is feared. Twenty per cent of Oxford applicants get a place at a college different from their initial choice. University websites offer some advice and links to all colleges.

Please note that it is not necessary to apply to a particular college at Oxford or Cambridge. You can decide to place an "Open Application". Open Applications are allocated to a college which has availability for the right applicants. If you are in the process of trying to identify a college, there may be certain issues you wish to consider:

- *The chance of receiving an offer will vary from subject to subject and college to college. Use the information in the prospectus to get an idea of the pattern of applications to colleges and courses. Some colleges and courses attract a much higher level of application. Talk to the admissions tutor on the phone to 'test the water' about matters concerning your application. Note however that an over-reliance on tables and statistics can be misleading. Most applicants choose a college on the basis of non-academic criteria (location, accommodation, catering, facilities) all of which are acceptable reasons.*
- *It is sometimes a good idea to go for a college in which students from your school have been successful in the past.*
- *Colleges are keen to increase their state school applicant numbers. This will tend to be from known 'good' schools and still will only apply to students with the highest academic record and potential.*
- *Check that you can study your chosen subject at a particular college. The prospectus will provide details of the subjects each college offers.*
- *Murray Edwards College, Lucy Cavendish College and Newnham College at Cambridge only admit women.*
- *All subjects have formally agreed admission criteria, which apply to all students wishing to study a certain subject regardless of the college of choice. These subject-specific criteria can be found on [www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate\\_courses/courses/index.html](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/courses/index.html) students need click on their subject of choice and then read the "how to apply" section.*

- *For a number of subjects additional admissions tests need to be sat, for example, for medicine and law.*
- *Colleges have their own, more detailed prospectus. You should make sure you read this thoroughly.*
- *Try to attend the Open Days at your preferred college(s), which are usually in the summer but sometimes in September. You can search by college or by subject. These can be found on the following web pages:*
- *Many colleges in Oxford are opting for small printed prospectuses; students are strongly encouraged to look for the relevant information on the college web pages.*
- *Get hold of the Alternative Prospectuses which give a very useful users' guide to the two universities. Refer to the section 'publications, Web Sites, Support Schemes and Contacts' in this guide for details.*

## USING THE DATA IN THE PROSPECTUSES

Apart from providing information about courses, colleges and the applications, process, the prospectuses contain useful data which might help you choose a course and college.

### **CAMBRIDGE DATA INCLUDES:**

- **THE DISTRIBUTION OF APPLICATIONS BY COLLEGE FOR THE LARGER TRIPOS SUBJECTS:** *This will give some idea of which colleges are likely to be more competitive for a particular subject.*
- **ADMISSIONS STATISTICS:** *A very important source of data which is based on the previous year's applications. This will give you an idea of how competitive your subject is compared with other subjects and, consequently, of your chances of getting a place.*

### **OXFORD DATA INCLUDES:**

- **UNDERGRADUATE NUMBERS BY COLLEGE:** *The number of places for a particular subject at a college is relatively small. This table will give you some idea of the number of places you are competing for at each college in your chosen subject.*
- **APPLICATIONS AND ACCEPTANCES BY SUBJECT:** *A very important source of data which is based on the previous year's applications. This will give you an idea of how competitive your subject is compared with other subjects and, consequently, of your chances of getting a place.*
- **APPENDIX F (RATIOS OF APPLICATIONS TO OFFERS BY COLLEGE):** *Another very useful table based on an average of the previous three years' applications. It will tell you which are likely to be the more competitive colleges for a particular subject. However, do bear in mind that around 20% of successful applicants are placed at a college other than their first choice. These ratios do not reflect this.*
- **COLLEGES AND SUBJECTS:** *It is important to check this to make sure that the college you wish to apply to offers the subject you want to study!*

# THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Please refer to the following web pages:

[www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford)

[www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/](http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/)

## ANNUAL TIMETABLE FOR ADMISSIONS AND KEY DATES

- 1 **Early September** – Applications to be completed and sent.
- 2 **September to November** – Tests for selected courses which are sat locally. E.g. BMAT, LNAT, HAT, UKCAT, etc.
- 3 **15 October** – Applications received as part of UCAS application. Cambridge subsequently send a request for supplementary details. (SAQ)
- 4 **Late October** – Colleges allocated by Admissions Office computer. Open applicants allocated three colleges and candidates who have named a college of preference allocated two colleges.
- 5 **October/November** – Many of the admissions tests take place now. 2018 admissions tests took place during half term!
- 6 **15 November** – Written work, where required, submitted to college of preference.
- 7 **Late November** – Tutors meet to discuss which candidates will be interviewed. In considering candidates, tutors look at:
  - i Academic Record – (GCSE Results and A level predictions/grades or other school leaving qualifications).
  - ii Confidential Reference.
  - iii Written work, if submitted.
- 8 **Early December** – Interviews take place in Oxbridge. Some subjects will set a written test to be taken at interview for which no preparation is necessary. Written work and written tests may be drawn on in interview. Format may vary from college to college and from subject to subject.

**N.B: EACH college and course will have its own bespoke requirements for entrance examinations and specified work submission.** It will be the student's responsibility to ensure they fulfill all the expectations for their application. Emails will be sent post application to

candidates. Students must therefore ensure they are regularly checking emails (including their junk emails) as Roundwood will not receive this information.

Tutors now assess:

- i Ability to think independently.
- ii Potential.
- iii Motivation.
- iv Commitment.
- v Enthusiasm.

- 9 **Early December** – Intercollegiate co-operation during and after the interviews to arrange interviews at other colleges and to consider which candidates will be offered places.
- 10 **January** – Cambridge applicants who have been pooled may be asked to return for a further interview or receive an offer from a different college. Oxford shortlisted candidates told the outcome of their application.
- 11 **March 2019** – Student conferences in locations across the UK.
- 12 **3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019** - Oxford Open Days. Bookings open March/April. Register interest.
- 13 **4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July 2019** - Cambridge Open Days. Bookings open April 2019. Register interest.
- 14 **Mid August** – A-level results published. Confirmation of places for conditional offer candidates.
- 15 **September 20<sup>th</sup> 2019** – Oxford Open day.
- 16 **Early October** – Arrive at college in Oxbridge for Freshers Week.



## **Summer Schools**

Summer Schools are run to give the most academic students a flavour of learning and mixing with other students at a similar level to themselves.

Oxbridge look very favourably on attendance at these Summer Schools. In addition, most students who attend report enthusiastically about the experience they feel they have gained by attending such courses.

As well as Oxford and Cambridge running their own summer school courses, two reputable courses we have encouraged in the past are:

### **Eton Summer School**

<https://www.etoncollege.com/USSWebsite.aspx>

### **The Sutton Trust Summer Schools**

<https://summerschools.suttontrust.com/university/university-of-oxford/>

## **Further Links and Resources for Students**

### **Subject Taster/Study Days for students in Years 9-13**

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/visiting-and-outreach/outreach-events?wssl=1>

### **Oxford Pathways Programme**

Pathways is a series of free events for students in Years 10-13 for targeted state schools. These events provide information and advice to students who have the potential to achieve Oxford's entry requirements. The programme includes tailored projects for each year group.

<https://www.pathways.ox.ac.uk/>

### **Student Conferences**

<https://www.oxfordandcambridgeoutreach.co.uk/student-conference/introduction>

### **UNIQ Summer School**

UNIQ is open to students in Year 12 who are based at UK state schools/colleges. Students apply for a specific course that aims to give them a realistic view of Oxford student life. UNIQ participants live in an Oxford college for one week in the summer. They attend lectures and seminars in their chosen subject, and workshops about applying to Oxford.

<http://www.uniq.ox.ac.uk/>

### **Sutton Trust Summer School**

<https://summerschools.suttontrust.com/university/university-of-oxford/>

### **Target Oxford**

It is a programme for Year 12 students that helps high-achieving black students gain places at the UK's top universities to expand.

<https://targetoxbridge.co.uk/>

### **Student Shadowing**

Year 12 students from state schools are invited to spend the morning shadowing an Oxford undergraduate that is studying their chosen subject area. They will then have lunch in an Oxford college and attend a workshop which will explore various common misconceptions about the University and student life, and give plenty of opportunity to ask questions.

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/open-days-outreach/events-students-teachers/target-schools-shadowing-day-2>

### **Academic Competitions**

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/teachers/academic-competitions-schools-and-colleges>

### **University Open Days**

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/visiting-and-outreach/open-days?wssl=1>

### **School links to Oxford colleges**

Every school in the UK is linked to one of Oxford's Colleges. Each college will also offer a series of events and programmes for students in its link regions

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/teachers/link-colleges>

### **Cambridge Subject Masterclasses**

Subject-specific events offering students in Year 12 (or equivalent) a flavour of undergraduate study and an introduction to the University of Cambridge.

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events/masterclasses>

### **The Subject Matters – Cambridge**

Events for students in Year 11 (or equivalent) which highlight the importance of suitable A Level (or equivalent) subject choices for applications to selective, research-intensive universities. <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events/subjectmatters>