

APPLYING TO OXBRIDGE - THE APPLICATION PROCESS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Oxford and Cambridge represent the best Universities in the country and a degree from these institutions is a prestigious award. Therefore an application put forward to an Oxbridge college must, from the outset, be a realistic one.

In order to assess whether your application would be realistic, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you got a top set of GCSE (and AS) grades behind you?
- Are you going to do well at AS? Cambridge will actually ask for your unit scores (and will look for c. 270/300 for each AS)
- Are you going to perform sufficiently well in your A2 examinations (**A*A*A* - AAA at A2**)?
- What do your subject teachers and tutors think of your applying to Oxbridge?
- Why do you want to go to Oxbridge?
- Are you prepared for the level/ quantity of work that you will face?
- Are you willing to put that work in?

The Oxbridge system and experience does not suit everyone and so it is better to ensure that you will be happy and will benefit from these universities if you do decide to apply. However, remember that there are many universities, particularly those within the Russell Group with similarly highly respected reputations and degrees.

WHY OXBRIDGE?

If you do decide to apply to Oxbridge then the advantages of this system are vast. The two universities have a long history of superb education and intellectual regard. The subjects will be presented in a challenging and difficult manner and you will be pushed to your limits to explore your chosen subject in depth and breadth. The academic system at both institutions is centred on the Tutorial (Oxford) and Supervision (Cambridge) systems. These are small group, or one on one, sessions with eminent fellows in the field where topics from lecture courses are investigated in more detail. There is no place to hide in these situations but the reward for being able to talk to the best and have them comment on your work is an incredibly stimulating one. These hour sessions give you the opportunity to really delve into a subject and take it in directions not possible in large group or lecture situations. The strength of Oxbridge teaching has relied on this system for centuries.

The terms are short and intense with little time to stop and watch the world around you. You will be shocked by the amount of work that you are required to do, but also by the amount of other activities open to you. Oxbridge has a collegiate system, where you apply to and belong to a college in the University. This will be your home and your immediate social circle. Tutorial teaching is organised through the Director of Studies for your subject in your college, whilst lectures are organised by the University departments. Each college is like a mini-university with a canteen, bar, sports fields, chapel, music/ drama facilities etc. although all colleges vary in age, size and particular provision. You can therefore represent your college in a sport, and if particularly talented you may go on to represent the university (this is true of most activities).

OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE?

Perhaps the first basic choice that you will have to make is whether you wish to apply to Oxford or Cambridge – you are not allowed to apply to both.

Your choice may be based on a number of different factors:

- Choice of subject – for example Cambridge offers a course in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic where Oxford doesn't; Oxford offers some joint honours degrees etc.

You must investigate the possibilities thoroughly – don't just decide now that you want to go to Cambridge without even giving the Oxford courses a quick glance (or vice versa) – you may find something more suitable at the other institution.

- Location – perhaps one or other city is more suitably located for your needs
- Connections – perhaps you have a family history connecting you to either University
- Your impression of the town – it is well worth going to both cities and having a look around, perhaps in association with a college or department open day – you will get an initial feel for the place and will quickly sense whether you would be comfortable there.

Further information on both universities are available on:

www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate,

www.admissions.ox.ac.uk,

WHICH COURSE?

Your choice of course is not necessarily as straight forward as it might seem. Cambridge and Oxford offer varying courses, some of which may only be available from the second year onward thus requiring you to choose an initial subject. You must read the prospectuses with great care and ensure you know exactly what is available for you to choose from.

To help you with this decision process, you should think very seriously about attending seminars, taster sessions, workshops and open days. Information about these events, many of which are free, are available from Mrs Tuff. Below are links to some forthcoming events:

The Sutton Trust Summer Programme: www.suttontrust.com,

Uniq Summer Programme: www.ox.ac.uk/uniq

Oxford & Cambridge Conference: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/

St Annes College open days: www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/

Sixth Form Study Days at Oxford: www.chch.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduates/access-initiatives/sixth-form

Does the course suit your needs/ wants as this stage?

If you know what it is that you want from a degree course, then make sure you check exactly what the degrees at Oxford and Cambridge entail. For example, many people choose **not** to study Medicine at Oxbridge because the undergraduate degree is highly theoretical, whilst other universities may be more practical from an earlier stage. Make sure that your course suits your needs.

WHICH COLLEGE?

Your application to Oxbridge will be principally through a college. This is an important choice as when you go to Oxford or Cambridge your college will be your home and the centre of your teaching. There are about 30 different colleges at each university. Each has its own unique history and strengths. There are single-sex colleges (for females) at each, and some colleges don't teach all of the subjects.

The most important considerations are:

- Does the college do your subject of choice? How many students do they ordinarily take per year, and how many applications do they expect? – ratio applications to entrants?
- You might also want to check whether the college has its own Director of Studies/ Fellow for the subject or if they rely on an “external Teaching fellow” i.e. one that is attached primarily to another college – this does not necessarily mean that you shouldn't apply there but be aware of who will be your link in the college.

- What are the specific fields of interest of the teaching fellows at your chosen college – if you know a particular area of your subject that you will hope to pursue you would be better placed to be at a college with a relevant Fellow.
- Remember that you will have a subject interview at the college and so will probably face the Director of Studies for the subject – it is useful to know what they are particularly interested in.
- Make sure you read the write ups in the prospectuses, and if possible arrange to go to an **Open Day** at the college – these are an ideal opportunity to have a good look around, perhaps speak to the Admissions Tutor and even the Director of Studies, and potentially there will be students around who are always a useful source of information.

Oxford - <http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/colleges/>

Cambridge - <http://www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/colleges.html>

OPEN APPLICATIONS

If you are unable to decide upon a college there is the possibility of submitting an Open application, where the university will assign you a college for initial interview. There is no disadvantage to an Open application (if you are not fussy about colleges) and the potential advantage is being assigned a college which has a low application rate for that year. There is information on Open applications in the prospectuses and online.

Caution! Do not just apply for the college that looks good, or is the richest or most famous – you may well greatly reduce your chances of getting in by doing so. Remember that regardless of which college you attend you will get an Oxford or Cambridge degree at the end of it. Please research this carefully.

YOUR APPLICATION

Your application to Oxford or Cambridge as well as Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary courses, are through the UCAS online application process. UCAS registration is through Post 16 and begins in the **July prior to entry** (Year 12). Applications should be submitted to UCAS by **15th October in the year prior to entry**. References for all Oxbridge students will be written by Mr. Hull. Your choice of college should also be confirmed with Mr Hull prior to the summer holidays of Year 12 if possible.

In addition to your UCAS Application, Cambridge requires an online Supplementary Additional Questionnaire to be completed after your UCAS application has been submitted.

Entrance Examinations

Oxford and Cambridge require BMAT, UKCAT, LNAT for Medicine/ Vet and Law. And individual subjects have their own entrance tests e.g. HAT for History courses at Oxford, STEP for Mathematics at Cambridge – make sure you are aware of these before you apply, and if necessary consider this in your choice of University.

Personal Statements

One of the most important parts of your UCAS Application is your personal statement. This is your chance to explain what you want to do at University and any work experience/ extra reading you may have done. You must convince the reader of your commitment to the subject. You can also use this to tell of your other achievements – Oxbridge are looking for rounded people with something to offer the college and university.

You should start drafting your personal statement in the summer term of Year 12. Mr Hull can advise you on what to write and how to write it. There are also information and books available in Post 16 LRC on writing effective personal statements. A draft copy of your personal statement should be shown to Mr Hull before the summer holidays and you are expected to continue working on your statement over the summer break. Please be aware that a poorly written personal statement will weaken your application.

Background reading/ work experience

Applying to Oxford & Cambridge is very competitive, it is therefore important that your application stands out. You should show that your interest in your chosen subject area goes beyond the work that you have done at school. If you are applying for a school taught subject you must show greater depth/ understanding of the subject (e.g. for English you should have read more widely than just your set texts).

If you are applying for a non-school subject you must be able to explain and prove your interest in the subject (this might be through work experience e.g. in a law firm, or through reading, e.g. for Philosophy). It is not enough to turn up and say that it “just sounded interesting” – remember that the people interviewing have dedicated their lives to their subject, they therefore want you to be as engaged by the field as they are.

Good preparation is imperative, and any work you do at this stage will prove your devotion to the subject and give you something to add to your personal statement and talk about in the interview – do not underestimate the value of work experience.

OXBRIDGE APPLICATIONS - GETTING IN

Notification of the outcome of your application is usually made in early January. If you have been successful you will receive an offer relating to your impending examinations. This will be confirmed by UCAS also. For Cambridge applicants, if you are initially unsuccessful at your chosen college, but they deem you to be a suitable candidate, you may well be “pooled” and other colleges may then request an interview. You would then have to attend interviews in early January, and wait upon the outcome of these interviews. Unsuccessful candidates will be informed in January.

If you choose to accept the offer, and then fulfil its requirements (i.e. get the grades) your place at the university will be confirmed in writing by both the college and UCAS in August after the results. If you miss the offer, there may be some room for negotiation but lower grades are rarely accepted.

OXBRIDGE - APPLICATIONS TIMETABLE

Year 12		
Spring/	Identification of potential applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should express their interest to Mr Hull. • Students look for opportunities to attend Seminars, Taster sessions, eg Uniq Summer Programme, Sutton Trust Programme – see Mrs Tuff for information. • Students to research Assessment tests required eg BMAT,UKCAT,LNAT, HAT. STEP
Summer term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students to start drafting their Personal statements & submit copy to Mr Hull for feedback. • Students to register for UCAS through Post 16
Summer Holidays	Subject research/ experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students must embark on serious background reading • And/ or gain invaluable industry/ subject experience in the workplace • Students to continue completing UCAS ‘Apply’ application.
	Oxbridge Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge or Oxford? • Which college? • Which course?
	Personal Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise personal statement prior to returning to school
Year 13		
Autumn Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants for October 15th, to submit final copy of personal statement to Mr Hull . • Students to complete all sections of the ‘Apply’ application. • Students to pay & send their UCAS application ready for Mr Hull to write reference.
Deadline for Applications:	General Application October 15th Choral/Organ Scholarships September 1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCAS Application + Cambridge Application form/ Oxford Application form

	School Mock Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mock interview with Mr Hull
	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities begin interviewing.
	Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxbridge - notification over the Christmas/ New Year period
Spring Term	Cambridge Pool interviews Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates for Cambridge may be called for second round interviews - held in January. • Applicants begin receiving decisions from Universities. • Student Finance - online application for loans/grants opens.