

## Oxford and Cambridge – What you need to know

The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge have a great deal in common, including their collegiate structure, more personalised teaching methods and wealth of resources available to students.

There are important differences between the two institutions however and the UCAS system only allows an application to one or the other so students need to choose between them .

For more detailed information about each University, please see their *Undergraduate Prospectus* or get in touch.

### **Cambridge**

01223 33308

[admissions@cam.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@cam.ac.uk)

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

### **Oxford**

01865 288000

[study@ox.ac.uk](mailto:study@ox.ac.uk)

[www.ox.ac.uk/courses](http://www.ox.ac.uk/courses)

### **Choosing a course**

The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge agree that the most important decision a prospective applicant has to make is the course they wish to study, and that they should use this decision to direct and inform their choice of university. It's important that students do their research, read course details carefully and consider whether the structure and content of a course would suit them – they'll be studying at a high level for several years, so it's important to choose something that really inspires and motivates them.

At Oxford and Cambridge, courses tend to be traditional academic courses, with a strong emphasis on more personalised teaching through small-group tuition. Most formal assessment is through written examinations.

Both Universities are committed to recruiting the best and brightest students from all backgrounds. All of our admissions decisions are made on academic criteria – an applicant's ability and potential to succeed on their chosen course.

### **Choosing between Oxford and Cambridge**

It's not possible to apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same year, so students will have to choose one or the other. As mentioned above, an applicant's choice of university should be driven by course.

Both Universities are world-renowned in teaching and research in both arts and science subjects, with fantastic resources and facilities, so the decision is largely an individual one.

Some courses are offered at one of the Universities but not the other – students should check each institution's *Undergraduate Prospectus*/website for details of courses on offer. It's also important to be aware that courses with a similar title at the two Universities may be different in content. Therefore, it's important for students to check the course details to see which one will suit them best.

### **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/courses](http://www.cam.ac.uk/courses)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/courses](http://www.ox.ac.uk/courses)

### **Colleges**

Both Oxford and Cambridge are collegiate, meaning they're comprised of a number of individual Colleges, as well as academic departments.

Every student is a member of the University, their department and their College. It's the Universities (through the academic departments) that are responsible for course content, core teaching (lectures, seminars, practicals, projects), examinations and awarding degrees. This means that students are studying for the same degree, whichever College they go to.

A College will be a student's home while they're studying – Colleges provide a range of facilities, academic and pastoral support, and organise small-group tuition (which may be with a tutor/supervisor from another College).

The College system offers the benefits of being part of a large, diverse university, and also a member of a smaller, interdisciplinary College community, which usually includes both undergraduate and graduate students. Students will have access to their College's facilities, such as extensive library and IT provision, as well as the resources of the wider University.

The Colleges are responsible for admitting undergraduate students, and students can indicate if they have a preference College in their UCAS application. If they don't have a College preference, they can instead select an 'open' application and their application will be allocated to a College which has had relatively fewer applications for their course in that year.

Both Universities work hard to ensure that the best students are successful in gaining a place, whichever College they've applied or been

allocated to (in the case of open applications). This means that applicants may be interviewed by more than one College and students may receive an offer from a different College to the one to which they applied or were allocated.

### **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/ugcolls](http://www.cam.ac.uk/ugcolls)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/ugcolls](http://www.ox.ac.uk/ugcolls)

### **Teaching**

Teaching methods are very similar at both Universities, as students attend lectures, classes and laboratory work as appropriate for their course.

Unlike at many other universities, students at Oxford and Cambridge also benefit from highly personalised teaching time with experts in their field. The only difference is in the name: Oxford refers to these sessions as 'tutorials' while Cambridge calls them 'supervisions'.

Students are required to prepare an essay or other piece of work in advance for these sessions. Usually, tutorials/supervisions take place weekly, with students meeting with their tutor/supervisor to discuss the work with a small number of other students (most often up to three). These sessions aren't formally assessed so they don't contribute to a student's final degree classification, but they're used to assess students' progress on their course.

All tutors/supervisors are specialists, or suitably qualified/experienced so this time is extremely valuable to students in developing their understanding of the subject and for trying out new ideas.

### **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/supervisions](http://www.cam.ac.uk/supervisions)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/tutorials](http://www.ox.ac.uk/tutorials)

### **Assessment**

Students at both Oxford and Cambridge are assessed informally throughout their course by producing work for their tutorials/supervisions, which help to ensure students are on track. Formal assessment is almost entirely based on examinations, although some courses (where relevant) may include some practical assessment and in the final year of many courses one exam paper can be replaced with a dissertation.

At Oxford, most courses are formally assessed at the end of the first and final years, with the final degree classification result usually based on the exams taken at the end of the final year.

Most Cambridge students are assessed at the end of each year and their final degree classification is determined by their performance in exams in more than one year of their course.

### **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/courses](http://www.cam.ac.uk/courses)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/courses](http://www.ox.ac.uk/courses)

### **How to apply**

All students must apply online through UCAS by 6.00pm (UK time) on 15 October.

At Cambridge, some students are also required to complete the [Cambridge Online Preliminary Application \(COPA\)](#) in addition to their [UCAS application](#); and other deadlines may apply for some applicants. See the [Applying page](#) for information.

Cambridge also asks all applicants to complete an online [Supplementary Application Questionnaire \(SAQ\)](#) after submission of their [UCAS application](#) to ensure consistent information about all applicants.

Oxford doesn't require students to complete any extra forms.

Applicants typically need to take a written test/assessment as part of their application and may be asked to submit some written work. If a student's application is shortlisted, they'll be invited to the relevant University for interview.

### **Further details**

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

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/apply](http://www.ox.ac.uk/apply)

### **Assessing applications**

#### **Entrance requirements**

Applicants should make sure they're expected to achieve the required A Levels, International Baccalaureate (IB) grades or other equivalent qualifications. There may also be specific subject requirements for particular courses, especially in the sciences. At Cambridge, subject requirements may vary between the Colleges.

Conditional offers for Oxford range between A\*A\*A and AAA (depending on the course) at A Level, or 38-40 in the IB, including core points. Certain grades may be required at Higher Level.

The typical A Level offer for Cambridge is A\*AA or A\*A\*A depending on the course; or 40-42 in the IB, including core points, with 776 at Higher Level. Applicants may be required to achieve certain grades in particular subject(s), depending on individual circumstances.

Other equivalent qualifications are also welcome.

### **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/entrancerequirements](http://www.cam.ac.uk/entrancerequirements)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/enregs](http://www.ox.ac.uk/enregs)

### **Shortlisting**

Many applicants are predicted to achieve top grades and many also have excellent references. Therefore, it's not possible for Oxford or Cambridge to select the best students based on their UCAS applications alone. Each University has a slightly different approach to differentiating between applicants.

Oxford asks applicants for most of its courses to take a test as part of their application. Tutors then shortlist applicants based on students' applications and performance in the test. Where applications are around three per place, most applicants are shortlisted. For the most competitive degrees far fewer will be shortlisted, to allow those who most closely meet the selection criteria to have multiple interviews.

Cambridge traditionally interviews around 75 per cent of their undergraduate applicants. AS Level grades and specialist test scores are considered (where available), alongside all the other information available to selectors, both in deciding which applicants will be invited to interview and which will be offered a place.

### **Assessments/tests before interview**

Oxford has always required applicants to take written tests before interview for most courses. Please note that separate registration is required. These tests are usually taken in the students' own school or college.

About half of the courses at Cambridge require applicants to take a subject-specific pre-interview written assessment. Most students will be able to take their pre-interview assessment in their own school/college, and must be registered in advance for this by their assessment centre.

## **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/assessment](http://www.cam.ac.uk/assessment)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/tests](http://www.ox.ac.uk/tests)

## **Assessments/tests at interview**

Cambridge requires applicants for some courses to take a subject-specific written assessment when they're in Cambridge for interview (if interviewed). Students don't need to be registered in advance for an at-interview assessment.

## **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/assessment](http://www.cam.ac.uk/assessment)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/tests](http://www.ox.ac.uk/tests)

## **Written work**

Both Universities require some applicants to submit samples of written work as part of their application.

At Oxford the deadline for the submission of this work is 10 November. Applicants to Cambridge will be advised by their College when it needs to be submitted (usually early November).

## **Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/writtenwork](http://www.cam.ac.uk/writtenwork)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/writwork](http://www.ox.ac.uk/writwork)

## **Interviews**

The purpose and structure of these interviews is very similar at both Universities. They're a lot like a mini tutorial or supervision, where students may be given a small passage to read or perhaps set a small problem which they'll then discuss in the interview.

The main focus of interviews is to get a sense of how the student applies their existing knowledge and skills to unfamiliar problems, and how they process the information available. It's not a matter of how quickly – or even whether – the student arrives at a particular answer. There often aren't right or wrong answers, and it's the process of reaching their answer that's generally of most significance (rather than the answer itself). The interviewers just want to get an insight into how the student thinks.

It's important for students to understand that their performance at interview alone doesn't determine the outcome of their application – admissions decisions are made holistically, taking all available information into account.

**Further details**

Cambridge: [www.cam.ac.uk/interviews](http://www.cam.ac.uk/interviews)

Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/interviews](http://www.ox.ac.uk/interviews)