



Applying to Cambridge:
Advice for teachers, tutors and HE advisers

2011
entry

Welcome

Dear Teacher, Tutor or HE Adviser

Welcome to the latest edition of Applying to Cambridge. We value enormously the support and encouragement that teachers, tutors and HE advisers give to students who may be thinking of applying here, and hope that this brief compendium of information and advice will be a useful companion to the *Undergraduate Prospectus* and Undergraduate Admissions website. Please remember that we treat each applicant as an individual, and we are always happy to give personally specific advice where this is helpful.

In my foreword to last year's edition I drew attention to the work that was underway to implement a programme of new access initiatives funded through the generosity of alumnus Harvey McGrath. That work is beginning to bear fruit. One example is our new online Applicant Toolkit – a collection of information and resources to guide Cambridge applicants and their supporters through the admissions process (for more details, see p6). This is just the first of a number of new media developments that will go live over the coming year. In addition, we have substantially increased our summer school provision, both in terms of the numbers of places and the range of courses available, and we are piloting some new initiatives to support applicants and offer-holders from widening participation backgrounds.

On a more disappointing note, this past year has seen a particularly high incidence rate of erroneous statistics and misleading or incorrect information about the University being published in the media. Indeed, I am writing this having just dealt with another press inquiry arising from an inaccurate report about Cambridge admissions in a broadsheet newspaper. In light of such articles, I would encourage you to check our website for our response following any press coverage in future and should you have any further queries, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss them with you (contact details for the Cambridge Admissions Office can be found on the inside back cover).

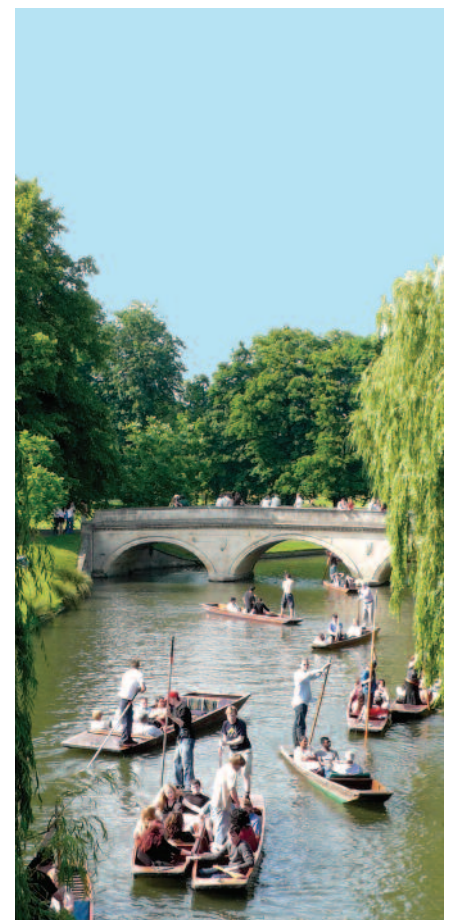
Finally, we look forward to welcoming many of you at our annual HE Advisers' Conference in September 2010. Further information will be available on our website from Easter and online booking will open during the summer term. In the meantime, if there is anything you want to know about Cambridge admissions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.



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Please note

This guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the information provided in the *Undergraduate Prospectus* and on the Undergraduate Admissions website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate).



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Admissions Policy

The principal aim of the Admissions Policy of the Colleges of the University of Cambridge is to offer admission to students of the highest intellectual potential, irrespective of social, racial, religious and financial considerations.

Two further aims are:

- *Aspiration*: to encourage applications from groups that are, at present, underrepresented at Cambridge
- *Fairness*: to ensure that each applicant is individually assessed, without partiality or bias, in accordance with the policy on Equal Opportunities, and to ensure that, as far as possible, an applicant's chance of admission to Cambridge does not depend on choice of College

Once students are admitted, we ensure that they are given the academic, personal and, where appropriate, financial support necessary for successful completion of their course at Cambridge.

You can find the full Admissions Policy online at:
www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/info/policy.html.

Application timetable

March – September

Undergraduate Prospectus available online and from the Cambridge Admissions Office

HE fairs, Oxford and Cambridge Student Conferences, open days and residential events

September

UCAS applications, which must be completed by all applicants applying to Cambridge, may be submitted from 1 September

Applicants for Medicine and Veterinary Medicine should register for the BMAT by 30 September

October

15 UCAS closing date for most applications to Cambridge

November

3 Applicants for Medicine and Veterinary Medicine sit the BMAT

December

The majority of interviews are held in the first three weeks of December

January

In early January, decisions are sent to all applicants

Selected applicants in the winter pool may be called for a further interview in early January

By the end of January, most applicants should have heard whether they have been accepted conditionally or unconditionally, or have been unsuccessful

March

1 Closing date for second application round for some mature and affiliated applicants (see p5)

June

A level and other examinations taken

August

Examination results published. All applicants holding offers should hear whether they have been successful or unsuccessful shortly after results day. All conditional offers must be met by the deadline set by UCAS

October

University term begins

Key facts and figures

The University of Cambridge has around 17,500 full-time students, including about 12,000 undergraduates

The undergraduate male/female ratio is 52:48. Around 10 per cent of undergraduates are from outside the UK

Cambridge has the highest retention rate in the UK, with the latest figures indicating that only one per cent of undergraduate students drop out

The University has extensive, up-to-date resources, including 114 libraries

In the 2007–08 undergraduate admissions round (ie applications for entry in October 2008 and deferred entry in October 2009)*:

- around 14,400 applications were received for approximately 3,400 undergraduate places
- 98 per cent of those accepted with three or more A levels achieved at least three A grades, and a further 5,400 applicants with three or more grade As at A level were unsuccessful
- the state/independent school ratio amongst UK/EU accepted applicants is 59:41
- 14 per cent of accepted applicants from the UK/EU were from ethnic minority backgrounds

*Updated figures for the 2008-09 admissions round will be added to the website as soon as they are available.

Why Cambridge?

The University of Cambridge is one of the world's great universities, providing a challenging, flexible and individual learning experience, which is consistently rated at the top of national league tables. Below are 10 reasons why we feel your students should consider applying to the University.

1 Academic excellence

Cambridge's teaching and research excellence has led to outstanding results in both the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Institutional Audits and in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). One of the most exciting things about Cambridge is the fact that students have the opportunity to be taught by people who are often world-leading experts in their field.

2 The collegiate structure

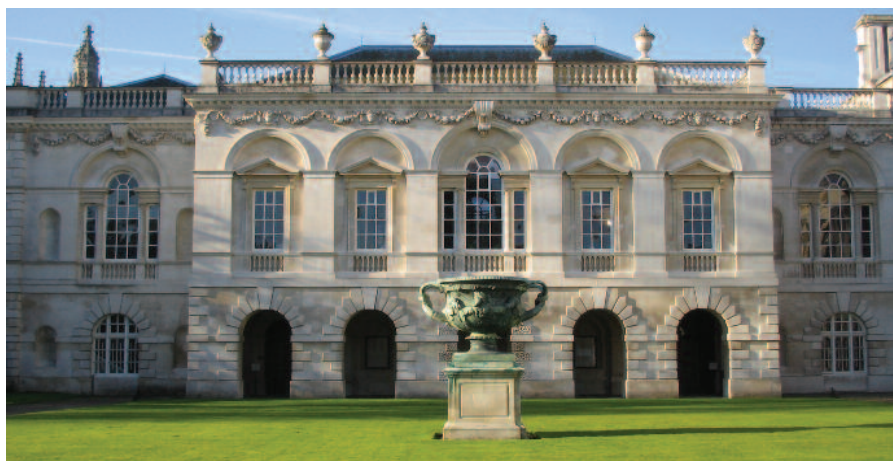
There are 29 Cambridge Colleges that admit undergraduate students and provide a place for them to live, study and socialise (though students in all Colleges take the same course and examinations, and are awarded degrees by the University of Cambridge). The collegiate system provides a unique learning experience and offers a huge amount of support for each student individually.

3 Flexible learning

Our degree courses (referred to at Cambridge as Triposes) cover subjects very broadly in the first year, before becoming increasingly specialised in later years. This can be very advantageous for students as it allows them to explore their subject widely before choosing an area on which to focus. Cambridge courses offer a tough challenge, but one which our students relish.

4 Personal tuition

Each week in addition to lectures, practicals and seminars, which are organised by the appropriate department or faculty, students receive small-group tuition (often in pairs) from a senior member of the University. This hour-long personal tuition, known as a 'supervision', is one of the most distinctive features of the Cambridge system and allows students to explore course material in much greater depth, investigate new approaches and clarify anything they are unclear of.



5 Outstanding educational and personal support

To help our students to succeed we offer expert teachers and lecturers, excellent library and computing facilities, superb labs and lots of support. Within their Colleges, all undergraduates have a Director of Studies (DoS) who looks after their academic welfare, and a Tutor who is available to advise on any personal or financial matters. Our far-reaching system of welfare and support ensures that students' individual needs are recognised and met – as a result we have the highest student retention rate in the UK.

6 Accommodation guarantee

The Cambridge Colleges guarantee accommodation to single undergraduate students without a family for three years and most also provide for fourth year students, so very few have to pay commercial rents. The terms at Cambridge are also short (eight weeks in length), and students are only charged rent when they are in residence (usually 24-30 weeks, rather than a full year).

7 Low cost of living

Cambridge is a relatively inexpensive place to study. Transport costs in the city are minimal, as it is easy to get around on foot or by bicycle; and study costs are kept low because we are fortunate to have excellent computing and library facilities.

8 Bursaries of over £3,000 pa available

Substantial financial support is available from the University and the Colleges for those who need it. This includes the Cambridge Bursary Scheme for UK and EU students, which is one of the most extensive undergraduate bursary schemes in the country. In 2010-11, all students who receive the full government maintenance grant will also be eligible to receive the full Cambridge Bursary of £3,400 (£5,650 for some mature students) for each year of their course.

9 Everyone 'fits in'

There is no such thing as a typical Cambridge student. You'll find students from all parts of the country (and the world) and from all backgrounds. Our students work hard and play hard. In fact, there are around 600 clubs and societies for them to choose from in addition to everything the city has to offer.

10 Excellent career prospects

Cambridge graduates go into a very wide range of occupations, and are highly employable and greatly sought after throughout the world – illustrated by our having one of the highest graduate employment rates in the UK. The flexibility, teaching style and demands of our degree courses ensure that students develop a range of transferable skills, which are crucial to a successful career.

Applying to Cambridge

The process of applying to Cambridge is much the same as applying to other universities. However, at Cambridge applicants are admitted by the Colleges, rather than by departments or faculties. Students must either choose a College or make an open application.

Choosing a College

Students should be advised not to agonise for too long over which College to choose. Colleges are more alike than they are different and most students are very happy at whichever College they are admitted to (they may receive an offer from a different College to the one they apply/are allocated to through the pool system, see p4).

Information about the different Colleges is available in the *Undergraduate Prospectus* and Colleges produce their own brochures and have information on their websites (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/). It can be helpful to visit Cambridge, either coming to an open day or arranging a separate visit.

When choosing a College, students might wish to take the following into account:

- course – most Colleges take students in all subjects, but a few do not
- selection procedures – admissions criteria are very similar for all Colleges. However, there can be small differences in arrangements before and at interview. Please see our website for more details
- age – four Colleges are exclusively for mature students (aged 21 or over), and their facilities are geared accordingly
- gender – three Colleges exclusively admit women
- College size (number of students), location and type of buildings
- particular facilities

Please be aware that a number of misconceptions exist about choosing a College (eg based on application statistics, specialisms of College Fellows, age of the College etc). Advice about how not to choose a College is available on our website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/).

Please note that students can only submit one application to the University, either specifying a particular College or making an open application. If a student has unusual qualifications or has particular needs, it is advisable to apply to an individual College after seeking advice from them, rather than make an open application.

Open applications

If a student does not mind at which College they end up, it is worth recommending an open application to them, in which the applicant does not specify a College.

Students making an open application will need to submit a UCAS application (selecting campus code '9') by 15 October. After this date each open application is randomly allocated by a computer program to a College which happens, in that year, to have received fewer applications per place in that subject than the average number across all Colleges. Once allocated, open applications are treated exactly the same as any other application to that College and the success rate for equally qualified UK/EU applicants making open applications is the same as for those applying directly to a College.

Before submitting an open application, students should be sure they will be quite happy whatever the outcome of the allocation, as it cannot be changed once it is done.

UCAS application

For 2011 entry (or deferred entry in 2012) students must submit a UCAS application in order to apply to Cambridge. On the UCAS application students should enter 'Cambridge' as one of their options in the 'choices' section as well as the appropriate College (UCAS campus) code if they are applying to a College or '9' if they are making an open application.

In addition to their UCAS application, applicants will need to submit another application form if they are:

- living outside the EU (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/)
- applying for the Graduate Course in Medicine (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/forms/medgrad.pdf)
- eligible to be considered under the Cambridge Special Access Scheme (see p5)
- also applying for a Choral Award or Organ Scholarship (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/musicawards/)

Please note

It is not possible for students to apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same year.

Application deadline

The deadline for applying to Cambridge for most students is 15 October¹.

This earlier deadline is to ensure that there is sufficient time for all applicants to be assessed equally and fairly. This includes interviewing every applicant with a realistic chance of being made an offer (approximately 90 per cent of applicants) – a process involving over 20,000 interviews every year.

Because of the earlier deadline, we recommend that students are encouraged to think about Cambridge as one of their university options at an early stage, ideally before the end of Year 12 or equivalent. This will then enable them to attend open days at Cambridge and prepare their application well before the 15 October deadline.

¹ Please note that an earlier application deadline may apply for overseas students wishing to be interviewed overseas, and a later application deadline may apply to some mature students (see p5).

Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ)

In order to ensure that we have complete and consistent information about all of our applicants, students will be asked to complete an online Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ) after receipt of their UCAS application. The SAQ enables us to collect information that is not part of the UCAS application but is useful when assessing applications, for example, topics covered as part of AS/A level (or equivalent) courses (helpful for interviewers when deciding which questions to ask).

To make a valid application to the University of Cambridge, applicants must submit their SAQ by the deadline set. In the majority of cases it is anticipated that this deadline will be 22 October 2010². More information about the SAQ can be found on the University website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/saq.html).

² If a different deadline applies, the applicant's College will notify them of the date. If a student is in any doubt about the deadline by which they must complete the SAQ, they should contact the College as soon as possible to check.

Application outcome

Following the assessment of each undergraduate application (see 'The selection procedure', p7–11), there are three possible outcomes:

1. applicants may be made a conditional offer, if they are still studying for qualifications for entry, or an unconditional offer, if they have already gained the qualifications required
2. applicants may be 'pooled' for other Colleges to consider their application (see below for details)
3. applicants may be unsuccessful

The winter pool

The 'winter pool' is designed to ensure that the best applicants are offered places, no matter which College they applied/were allocated to. If a College is over-subscribed in a particular course, strong applicants are 'pooled' for other Colleges to consider. Applicants will also be pooled if the College that originally interviewed them thinks they need reassessment and to give Colleges the opportunity to consider applicants pooled by other Colleges as a 'calibration check' before finalising their offers.

As a result of being placed in the winter pool, applicants:

- may be asked to attend a further interview at another College, usually in January
- may be offered a place at another College (or the College that pooled them) without further interview
- may be unsuccessful

Normally, around one in five applicants are pooled and, of these, around one in four receives an offer. A second smaller pool takes place in August when the examination results are released and places are confirmed; this again helps to ensure that the best applicants gain places.



Clearing and the adjustment period

The University of Cambridge does not normally enter Clearing nor will places be available in the August 2011 adjustment period. If an applicant's results are much better than expected and they decide that they wish to try for a place at Cambridge, they will need to apply in the following year's application process.

Feedback on decisions

Many Colleges provide written feedback to schools/colleges after decisions have been made as a matter of course, and all Colleges are happy to discuss the outcome of applications by telephone or letter, providing the applicant has given us permission to do so. This is a requirement of the Data Protection Act, and applicants will normally be asked for their consent in a pre-interview questionnaire. Feedback is not, in general, sent to students or their parents/guardians, and teachers should decide what information it is appropriate to pass on.

Deferred entry

About one in ten students take a gap year before coming to Cambridge. This year out is a very useful time in which they can improve skills, earn money, travel and generally gain maturity and self-reliance. Please note:

- a number of Colleges encourage Engineering applicants to take a year out, to gain some industrial experience
- most Colleges generally prefer Mathematics applicants not to take a year out, but to apply for immediate entry
- it is not possible to defer entry to the Graduate Course in Medicine

Students intending to defer entry should indicate this on their UCAS application and be prepared to be asked about their plans at interview.

Age

There is no age requirement for admission to Cambridge, although the vast majority of undergraduates are 18 years or older when they come into residence. All applicants will need to demonstrate that they have the maturity and personal skills to cope with university level study. A student who will be aged 21 or over on commencing a course is classified as a mature student.

Cambridge Special Access Scheme

Admissions Tutors are aware that some applicants may not be predicted the high grades required, but will nevertheless have the potential and the motivation to follow a course at Cambridge successfully. The Cambridge Special Access Scheme (CSAS) is a University-wide initiative designed to ensure that Colleges have all the information they require in order to accurately assess applicants who have experienced particular personal, social or educational disadvantage. The CSAS is supported by all standard-age Colleges and students are eligible to apply through the CSAS if either of the following criteria apply:

- their school/college has a low level of entry into higher education AND the student's family has little or no tradition of entry into higher education
- the student's education has been severely disrupted or disadvantaged through ill-health, personal problems, disability or difficulties in schooling

The form should be completed by the school/college (not the applicant) and returned by 15 October 2010 to the College to which the student is applying or the Cambridge Admissions Office if they are making an open application. Copies of the form can be obtained from the Cambridge Admissions Office or any College admissions office, and it is also available online at: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/forms/csas.pdf.

Mature students

Mature students with Access to HE Diplomas, A levels, OU or other qualifications are welcome to apply to any of the Cambridge Colleges. Cambridge has four Colleges for mature students only (Hughes Hall, Lucy Cavendish, St Edmund's and Wolfson) which have the most experience in assessing applicants with Access to HE qualifications.

The standard closing date for applications is 15 October 2010. However, the mature Colleges will also consider some applications submitted after this date as part of a second application round, the deadline for which is 1 March 2011. With the exception of Wolfson College, the mature Colleges may also consider applications made after this date if places are still available. All mature applicants wishing to make an open application, as well as those who want to apply to a standard-age College must submit their application by the 15 October deadline. Similarly, all applicants for Architecture, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (regardless of College choice) must submit their application by 15 October.

When writing references for applicants studying towards an Access to HE Diploma or other qualifications please give as much information as possible about assessment procedures and the grading system for the course, as well as details about the applicant's performance so far. We are aware that this can be difficult, as some students may have only just started their courses. If applicable please make it clear that the student is on a one-year course and try to give as much information as you can about their academic achievement. You could also offer to write a second reference at a later date; Admissions Tutors may find this useful. Please contact College admissions offices for further information and advice.

Care leavers

All Colleges welcome applications from students who are or have been in care, and the University is able to offer a range of support and guidance for care leavers studying here. As well as the support that is available to all students, care leavers are entitled to year-round College-owned accommodation, should they wish to stay in Cambridge over the vacations.

Any students who are or have been in care can find more information and guidance about visiting or studying at the University on the website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/care/), or by contacting the Cambridge Admissions Office on 01223 766872 or by email at: care@cao.cam.ac.uk.

Students with disabilities

The University of Cambridge welcomes applications from people with disabilities and/or a chronic illness, and the collegiate system ensures we can provide a high level of individual attention to all our students. Many Colleges have special facilities and will try to accommodate particular needs as far as possible, for example, adapting rooms for wheelchair users and offering accommodation for carers.

The University's Disability Resource Centre (DRC) provides advice, information and support to both applicants and students with a disability or specific learning difficulty. Applicants, and their parents or teachers/tutors, are invited to contact the DRC to arrange individual visits and to talk informally to admissions staff and discuss their support needs. The DRC also gives advice on the accessibility of Colleges and departments, and the facilities that Cambridge offers for those with particular disabilities or chronic illnesses. Contact details for the DRC can be found on the inside back cover.

We strongly recommend that applicants disclose their disability in their UCAS application. This is so we can contact them to discuss their specific needs and ensure appropriate adjustments are in place, such as scheduling interviews in accessible rooms.

Applicant Toolkit

The Cambridge Admissions Office has developed an Applicant Toolkit, designed to provide Cambridge applicants and their supporters (teachers, HE advisers, parents and others) with information and resources to guide them through the application process. You can access the Toolkit on our website at: www.cam.ac.uk/applicant-toolkit/.



The selection procedure

Admission to Cambridge is highly competitive and admissions staff are required to make very difficult decisions when choosing between applicants. Applicants are assessed on their suitability for the chosen course and their potential to most benefit from and flourish in the Cambridge environment. Each applicant is considered individually, using all the information available as outlined (1–6) below.

There is no blueprint of an ideal Cambridge student, but there are certain qualities that Admissions Tutors are looking for:

- academic ability and potential – in addition to their academic record, selectors are assessing how well an applicant can discuss their ideas and opinions, whether they are capable of logical and independent thought, and whether they show intellectual flexibility and are willing to engage with new ideas
- motivation and suitability for the chosen course – applicants should show enthusiasm and commitment for their chosen course and for education generally. This could be demonstrated, for example, by the exploration of their subject beyond the school curriculum and by wider reading
- commitment and self-discipline – successful applicants are self-motivated, self-disciplined and academically committed. This could be shown by good time-management in the balance of their various academic and personal commitments, for instance

1 Academic record

Selection is based on the applicant's academic ability and potential. Successful applicants are amongst the most able students in their school/college in the subjects most closely related to their chosen university course.

GCSEs/IGCSEs

With the exception of the pre-medical requirements for Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, there are no GCSE/IGCSE requirements for entry to Cambridge.

An applicant's GCSE/IGCSE results are looked at as a performance indicator, but within the context of the school/college performance. It is generally expected that the applicant will have achieved high grades in subjects relevant to their chosen course; most students who apply do have at least four or five As or A*s at GCSE/IGCSE. However, there are always exceptions: for example, a brilliant mathematician whose only A* at GCSE/IGCSE is in Mathematics. One of the strengths of the Cambridge admissions system is its ability to assess all applicants individually.

Post-16 subject choices

The AS and A level subject choices made in Year 11 (or equivalent) can have a significant impact on a student's higher education options. When assessing applicants at the University of Cambridge, we consider not only the individual A level (or equivalent) subjects being offered but also the combination of these. We generally prefer applicants to have taken certain subjects, or combinations of subjects, because we believe that they are more likely to provide an effective preparation for study at the University.

Many Cambridge courses require prior knowledge of certain subjects and Colleges will expect such subjects to be passed, normally with at least an A grade at A level or equivalent. Students who have decided on a course that they would like to study at university are recommended to look at the course requirements before finalising their A level subject choices to check their suitability for entry.

Those students unsure about the course they would like to study should note that there are certain A level subjects that are considered either 'essential' or 'desirable' for a number of courses at Cambridge. Therefore choosing one or more of these can help keep higher education options open. These subjects include:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- English Literature¹
- Further Mathematics²
- History
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Physics

For further advice please see our *Subject Matters* leaflet (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/).

¹ English Language and Literature can be an acceptable alternative.

² For students in England and Wales the Further Mathematics Support Programme (www.furthermaths.org.uk) offers the opportunity to study Further Mathematics even if it is not offered by their school/college.

AS levels

Students should choose a combination of AS level subjects which give a good preparation for their selected course at university. Advice about AS and A level subject requirements for our courses is given in the *Undergraduate Prospectus* and on the University website. In addition, Admissions Tutors are always happy to give general and subject-specific advice to potential applicants.

A levels

We welcome the introduction of the A* grade at A level. We hope that it will enable us to return to a situation in which we are able to make more conditional offers than we have places available. This will mean that more students are given the chance to earn a place at Cambridge through their performance in public examinations at the end of Year 13.

For 2011 entry, the typical A level offer for all courses at Cambridge will be A*AA. It is unlikely that the subject in which the A* must be achieved will be specified and Colleges may vary offers according to individual circumstances. For example, lower offers may be made to students applying through the Cambridge Special Access Scheme (see p5). On the other hand, more challenging offers may be set to ensure that the applicant can cope with the demands of exams in cases where some doubt exists.

We recognise that predicting the A* will be difficult for schools/colleges. We will therefore not be placing any weight on whether or not an applicant is predicted an A*. More information about use of the A* at A level can be found on our website at: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/teachers/.

Sixth Term Examination Papers in Mathematics (STEP)

STEP Mathematics is used to supplement A levels in assessing applicants' aptitude for the Mathematics course at Cambridge. Papers are based on A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics specifications, and so requires no further knowledge. The questions are designed to test qualities such as insight, originality, and the ability to use standard techniques in unusual ways and situations.

Colleges use STEP as part of almost all conditional offers that they make for Mathematics (including Mathematics with Physics) and Computer Science with Mathematics. Some Colleges also include STEP in conditional offers to applicants for courses which require strong mathematical ability (see the *Undergraduate Prospectus* or website for details). More information about STEP, including past papers, can be found on the STEP website at: www.stepmathematics.org.uk.

Extended Projects

We welcome the introduction of the Extended Project and would encourage students to undertake one in order to help them develop independent study and research skills and ease the transition from school/college to higher education. However, completion of an Extended Project will not be a requirement of any offer made.

AQA Baccalaureate

Applicants taking the AQA Baccalaureate should note that this is an acceptable qualification for entry to Cambridge. However, offers will be conditional on achievement in the A levels within the qualification rather than the overall Baccalaureate award.

Cambridge Pre-U

We welcome applications from students who are studying towards either the full Cambridge Pre-U Diploma or certain Principal Subjects within the qualification alongside A levels. Conditional offers will be set on an individual basis but are likely to include achieving Distinction level grades (D2 or D3) in Principal Subjects.

Diplomas

We will be considering the acceptability of the new Diplomas for our courses on a case-by-case basis. Of the Advanced Diplomas currently available we accept:

- the Advanced Diplomas in Engineering and in Manufacturing and Product Design for Engineering as long as the applicant has taken specified options within the Additional Specialist Learning component (see website for details)
- the Advanced Diploma in Environmental and Land-based Studies for Geography,

Land Economy and Natural Sciences (Biological) as long as the applicant has taken two appropriate A levels within the Additional Specialist Learning component (see website for details)

Other examination systems

Although this booklet mainly refers to A levels, other qualifications at an equivalent level are equally acceptable. The box below summarises typical offer levels in some of the more common examination systems (please see the website for more details and advice regarding suitable subject choices).

Typical offer levels in other examination systems

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

- 7,7,6 or 7,7,7 in Higher Level subjects; plus
- Overall scores of between 39 and 42 out of 45

Scottish qualifications

- Minimum of four A grades at Higher Grade; plus
- AAB or AAA in Advanced Highers
- Three Advanced Highers expected as part of the Scottish Baccalaureate qualification

Irish Leaving Certificate

- AAABB to AAAAA at Higher Level

Access to HE Diploma

- 60 credits with a minimum of 45 credits at level 3 (or equivalent)
- Additional subject-specific requirements may be applied

Vocational qualifications

VCE A levels, Applied A levels, GNVQs and BTECs are not an ideal preparation for most Cambridge courses, where the emphasis is more academic than vocational. However, certain combinations of A levels and vocational qualifications may be acceptable for some courses. Potential applicants taking these qualifications are advised to seek further advice from an Admissions Tutor.

Applicants studying a mix of qualifications

We are happy to consider applicants who are taking a combination of qualifications drawn from different examination systems, for instance a mixture of Advanced Highers and A levels or of A levels and IB Higher Level subjects, provided that the individual qualifications are considered acceptable and the subject requirements for the appropriate course are met. If a conditional offer is made it will normally ask for achievement in line with typical offers made to applicants taking a single type of qualification. However, the exact details of such conditional offers will inevitably depend on the individual circumstances of the application.



2 School/college reference

Grades are not everything and the school/college reference is useful because it tells us about an applicant's abilities and potential. Comments from subject specialists that show evidence of intellectual flexibility and curiosity, analytic ability, logical reasoning and the ability to learn quickly are most useful.

The majority of our applicants are predicted to achieve top grades in the qualifications they are studying and words such as 'outstanding' appear in very many references. Instead, it is helpful if remarks about academic performance and potential are made as specific as possible. The following can be particularly useful:

- comments from subject teachers indicating a rank order in class (such as 'top of 20' or 'in the top four out of 23') or a comparison with current or previous applicants (for instance 'one of our top 10 university applicants this year')
- updated information about an applicant's progress or personal circumstances, as long as it is received before the December interview period
- where an applicant has underachieved at GCSE/IGCSE or AS level, the reasons why this might have happened
- any health or personal circumstances that might affect performance at interview
- evidence of a willingness to explore and discuss ideas outside the confines of the subject specification, if applying for a subject studied at school/college
- evidence of steps taken to find out about the subject, for a non-school/college subject

For applicants with a particularly difficult educational or personal background an additional reference for the Cambridge Special Access Scheme should be completed (see p5).

Please note that there is no need to write a special reference for Cambridge as we receive a copy of the UCAS reference you supply. However, if you wish to make any Cambridge-specific comments you are most welcome to send these direct to the Admissions Tutor at the College to which the student applied or to the Cambridge Admissions Office in the case of open applicants. Please ensure that the applicant's name, course and UCAS Personal ID are clearly stated.

3 Personal statement

Personal statements allow students to tell us about their subject interest and this is something we almost always pursue at interview. Moreover, the process of writing a personal statement can help a student better understand their academic interests and intellectual motivations. This in itself is an important element in the preparation for any interview.

What should a personal statement contain?

Students are advised to follow the UCAS advice about what to include in their personal statement.

At Cambridge, all admissions decisions are based solely on academic criteria (ability, commitment and potential). Therefore, in their personal statement, we are looking for an applicant to:

- explain their reasons for wanting to study the subject at university
- demonstrate their enthusiasm and commitment for their chosen course
- express any particular interests within the field
- outline how they have pursued their interest in the subject in their own time

Such information is often used as a basis for discussion at interview.

How important are extra-curricular activities?

As fulfilment of academic criteria leads our admissions decisions, a student's participation (or not) in extra-curricular activities is not assessed and does not affect their chances of being made an offer of a place at Cambridge. Instead, our selectors look at how extra-curricular activities demonstrate other characteristics in a student that will aid their transition to life at university, such as how they balance their academic and personal commitments, and have developed particular skills or qualities (such as perseverance, independence, leadership or team-working). However, students should be advised to consider the importance that their other university choices may place on extra-curricular activities when composing their personal statement.

Cambridge-specific comments

Applicants can if they wish make additional comments particularly relevant to their Cambridge application on their SAQ. This is an opportunity to highlight particular features of the Cambridge course that attracted them. This additional personal statement is optional. Applicants will not be disadvantaged if they have nothing to add to this section of the SAQ and should be advised not to repeat information they provide in their UCAS personal statement here as we will have already received a copy of this.

4 Submitted work

Applicants may be asked to submit examples of their written work from a relevant A level (or equivalent) course, particularly for arts subjects. A discussion of this may then form part of the interview.

Details of the Colleges who ask for written work, and for which courses, can be found on our website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/). However, if this is required the College will advise the student as to what sort of work this should be, where it should be sent and the deadline for its submission.

If requested, we recommend that students submit work that they are enthusiastic about and will be happy discussing during their interview. Schools/colleges are asked to complete a cover sheet confirming that it is the applicant's own work and detailing the circumstances in which it was written.

5 Test results

Applicants for some courses are required to sit additional tests, designed to supplement the information available on their application and assess particular abilities, such as thinking skills and logical reasoning.

Bio-Medical Admissions Test (BMAT)

All applicants for Medicine or Veterinary Medicine are required to sit the Bio-Medical Admissions Test (BMAT) in their school/college, or other approved centre, after making their application and before coming for interview. The test is administered by Cambridge Assessment, and applicants must register for the BMAT with Cambridge Assessment by 30 September. The test itself will be taken on 3 November 2010.

The BMAT is used to assess scientific aptitude and focuses on abilities relevant to the study of Medicine or Veterinary Medicine at Cambridge. It is based on the factual knowledge of GCSE/IGCSE Mathematics and Dual Award Science, and does not require special teaching or preparation. Further details are available at www.bmat.org.uk.

Please note that there is a fee associated with taking the BMAT. Any students who are concerned about meeting the cost of this test should refer to the *Undergraduate Prospectus* or website for advice about financial support available.

Cambridge Law Test

Most Colleges will require applicants for Law to take the Cambridge Law Test. The test will last for one hour and will be taken by applicants when they are in Cambridge for interview. For further details about the test, including specimen papers see: www.law.cam.ac.uk/admissions/cambridge-law-test.php.

Students do not need to register in advance for the Cambridge Law Test and there is no charge associated with taking the test.



Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)

The Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) test is not subject-specific, but aims to test critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are highly relevant to successful study at degree level. It is taken by applicants when they come to Cambridge for interview; it is not used to pre-select applicants for interview.

A number of Colleges are currently using the TSA to assess applicants for the following courses:

- Computer Science
- Economics
- Engineering
- Land Economy
- Natural Sciences
- Politics, Psychology and Sociology

Details of which Colleges use the test for which courses can be found at: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/tests/.

Further information on the nature of the test, including sample questions can be accessed at: www.tsacambridge.org.uk.

Students do not need to register in advance for the TSA and there is no charge associated with taking the test.

6 Interviews

Who do we interview?

Interviews form an important part of our selection procedure. We review the gathered field and consider each applicant's individual circumstances before deciding who to invite to interview. We try to interview all applicants with a realistic chance of being offered a place on their chosen course at Cambridge. In 2009, about 90 per cent of UK/EU applicants were interviewed. Applicants with a good examination record and a favourable reference are likely to be asked to attend an interview. However, owing to the level of competition for places, there will be applicants each year who will not be interviewed.

When do the interviews take place?

Most interviews take place in the first three weeks of December and students are strongly advised not to make any unbreakable commitments for this period.

How long are the interviews and what are the arrangements?

The exact form and length of interviews vary from College to College and between subjects, but on average applicants will have two interviews of 20-30 minutes each. All Colleges send out detailed information and advice about interviews to applicants, explaining where to go, the format, and what will be expected of them, including whether any written work will be set. Applicants may be asked to stay overnight, in which case they will not normally be expected to pay for accommodation or meals.

What are the interviewers looking for?

The main focus of interviews is to explore the applicant's academic potential, motivation and suitability for their chosen course. Interview questions are designed to assess applicants' problem-solving abilities, their assimilation of new ideas and information, and their intellectual flexibility and analytical reasoning.

It is important for applicants to realise that interviewers will not be trying to 'catch them out', but will be challenging them to think for themselves and to show how they can apply their existing knowledge laterally to less familiar problems, in a manner comparable to that demanded by the supervision system. Interviews help selectors to gauge how an applicant would respond to the teaching methods used at Cambridge, while also giving the applicant the opportunity to experience this style of teaching.

Helping students prepare for interviews

You can help students prepare for their interviews by encouraging them to talk with confidence and enthusiasm about their subject and their wider interests. A mock interview given by a teacher or someone the student does not know can be helpful to give them the experience of expressing their ideas and opinions to a stranger. However, students are not expected to have ready-prepared answers – over-rehearsed answers can be counterproductive and are obvious to the interviewers.

Students should be encouraged to read broadly in the areas of their A level (or equivalent) subjects that they find particularly interesting and be prepared for questions about topical issues and developments connected to their chosen course. Students must be prepared to think quite hard but should also be reminded that there are not necessarily right or wrong answers to the questions they are asked. Very often, it is the process of reaching their answer that is of most significance, rather than the answer itself.

We have produced a short film called *Interviews in Action* and a booklet called *Cambridge Interviews: the facts* to provide more information about the interview process. These resources are also available on our website at: www.cam.ac.uk/interviews/.

Please note

We are aware of private companies who offer, at a charge, information and advice on our admissions process and interviews.

We DO NOT support or encourage any of these commercial enterprises. None of these companies has access to any information that is not already readily available free of charge to all schools, colleges and individual students from College admissions offices, the Cambridge Admissions Office or Cambridge University Students' Union.

Please contact the admissions office at any College or the Cambridge Admissions Office for more information.

Working with schools and colleges

The University and Colleges of Cambridge have developed, over many years, an extensive range of outreach and widening participation initiatives – from subject enrichment to attracting applications from groups currently underrepresented at Cambridge.

College Area Links Scheme

The Area Links Scheme links every Local Authority in England to a specific Cambridge College in order to build effective relationships with schools and colleges across the country. There are also links between the Cambridge Colleges and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Each College is currently working to develop links with and offer a programme of activities for schools/colleges in their regions. For example, Admissions Tutors and Schools Liaison Officers are visiting schools/colleges, running masterclasses and organising visits to Cambridge in order to raise aspirations.

There is no expectation or obligation for students to apply to their Link College and participation in Area Links Scheme initiatives does not influence whether Colleges invite applicants for interview or offer them places. Please also note that the Area Links Scheme does not preclude schools/colleges from contacting, or being contacted by, a College other than their Link College. Please contact the College linked to your LA for more information about the activities they are engaged in (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/arealinks/).

Cambridge Admissions Office

The Cambridge Admissions Office (CAO) organises several initiatives throughout the UK to encourage students to consider the University of Cambridge. A number of events are organised each year including:

- HE fairs and school visits
- Oxford and Cambridge Student Conferences
- Cambridge Open Days
- residential summer schools
- Challenge Days and Masterclasses
- events for specific groups of students; including mature students, FE students, BME students (through GEEMA – the Group to Encourage Ethnic Minority Applications) and care leavers

For more information about all these activities please contact CAO (see opposite).

Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU)

CUSU is also involved in widening participation activities through the Target Campaign. Each year about 1,000 students volunteer to visit state schools across the country, providing an opportunity for prospective students to hear what Cambridge is really like from a student's

perspective. In addition, CUSU organises a popular student Shadowing Scheme and other initiatives. For more information about all these activities please contact the CUSU Access Officer (see opposite).

Subject enrichment

Departments and faculties at the University of Cambridge are developing a range of initiatives which aim to support teachers by providing resources to enrich the educational experiences of students of all ages, across a number of subject areas. Details of all of these projects can now be accessed from the Cambridge in the Community Directory website at: www.cam.ac.uk/cambforall/.

Events for teachers, tutors and HE advisers

You are welcome to attend most of our open days and events with your students. However, please note that we also organise a number of specific events for teachers, tutors and HE advisers throughout the year. See the website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/teachers/) or contact the Cambridge Admissions Office for further information. Some Colleges also run events specifically for teachers and HE advisers.



Further information and advice

We are committed to ensuring that all relevant information and guidance about the Cambridge admissions process is freely and readily available to all.

Additional publications

In addition to the *Undergraduate Prospectus* and this guide for teachers, tutors and HE advisers, the University publishes a range of publications about undergraduate study and the application process which you may find helpful:

- *Cambridge Student Finance: the facts*
- *Cambridge Interviews: the facts*
- *What if I have a disability?*
- *Guide for Parents and Supporters*
- *Guide to Completing the SAQ*

All these publications, as well as other information about applying to and studying at Cambridge, are available from the Cambridge Admissions Office (see right) and on our website at: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/.

Differences between Cambridge and Oxford

The Universities of Cambridge and Oxford are frequently cited together by journalists, politicians and the world at large. Whilst there are many similarities between the application and admissions processes, there are a number of notable differences between the two institutions. A summary of these differences can be found on our website (www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/teachers/).

Cambridge Admissions Office (CAO)

Telephone: 01223 333308
Email: admissions@cam.ac.uk

The Cambridge Admissions Office can help with general enquiries about the application process.

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

College admissions offices

Admissions Tutors are happy to give advice to teachers about College admissions policies and other matters. Most Colleges welcome teachers' visits during open days or by appointment at other times. In addition, many Colleges have Schoolteacher Fellowships or vacation study visit programmes for teachers. All Colleges also produce their own brochures and have information on their websites.

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

Disability Resource Centre (DRC)

Telephone: 01223 332301
Textphone: 01223 764085
Email: ucam-disability@lists.cam.ac.uk

The Disability Resource Centre provides advice, information and support to applicants and students with a disability or specific learning difficulty.

www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/disability/

Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU)

CUSU Access Officer
Telephone: 01223 333313
Email: access@cusu.cam.ac.uk

Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) organise events and initiatives for prospective applicants as well as produce the *Alternative Prospectus*, which is available on their website or by contacting the Access Officer.

www.cusu.cam.ac.uk
www.applytocambridge.com

Details are correct at the time of printing (March 2010) but should be checked against the University website for the most up-to-date information.

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