

Oxbridge Programme HANDBOOK

2017 ~ 2018

Mr Cook
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Oxbridge Staff Support

“Education is the most powerful weapon which
you can use to change the world.”

– *Nelson Mandela*

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 grades behind you?
- Are you going to do well at A level? Cambridge will actually ask for your unit scores.
- Are you going to perform sufficiently well in your A level examinations (A*A*A* - AAA)?
- 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.

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Section 1: Selecting an institution and course

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 straightforward 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 Mr Cook, Ms Harrison or Mrs Greene. 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:
<https://www.oxfordandcambridgeoutreach.co.uk/student-conference/introduction>
- Sixth Form Study Days at Oxford: <http://www.pathways.ox.ac.uk>
- Outreach for BAME students

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?
- 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.

Section 2: Your Application

Your application to Oxford or Cambridge 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 Cook, Ms Harrison or Mrs Greene, along with the Head of Sixth Form. Your choice of college should also be confirmed with Mr Cook or Mrs Greene 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. Some individual subjects also 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 spring/ summer term of Year 12. We can advise you on what to write and how to write it. There are also information and books available in the LRC and Sixth Form Centre on writing effective personal statements. A draft copy of your personal statement should be shown to your teacher 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 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.

Section 3: Course overview

Should you choose to undertake the Oxbridge pathway, the timescale and deadlines for applications are as follows:

Year 12		
Autumn term	Identification of potential applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students should express their interest to Mr Cook, Ms Harrison or Mrs Greene.
Spring term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students look for opportunities to attend Seminars, Taster sessions, eg Uniq Summer Programme, Sutton Trust Programme – see Ms Petheram 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 for feedback. Students to register for UCAS. Students to attend an Oxbridge residential weekend.
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. • Students to complete all sections of the 'Apply' application. • Students to pay & send their UCAS application ready for UHS 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 interviews
	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.

Section 4: Oxbridge Sessions Overview

The Oxbridge programme runs from Spring Term of Year 12 until December of Year 13. As part of the Oxbridge pathway you are expected to attend weekly sessions with Mr Cook, Ms Harrison and Mrs Greene. Attendance will be kept- unexplained absences may affect the quality of your tutor reference. Sessions are in the Brescia building, Tuesdays 3:20-4:00.

Spring A

Week	Session	Outcome
1	Induction to the Oxbridge programme	Overview of the Oxbridge course at UHS, key staff members and student expectations
2	Oxford- an overview	Information on Oxford University, its history, colleges and courses on offer
3	Cambridge- an overview	Information on Cambridge University, its history, colleges and courses on offer
4	Building your passion for your subject	Students to commence on an academic essay on a subject of their interest, to present after the half term break.
5	Academic language	Deeper understanding of critical academic language, and how to apply this to essays and personal statements.
6	Course entry tests	Students to understand the entrance tests involved with specific Oxbridge subjects eg BMAT, UKCAT, LNAT, HAT, STEP

Spring B

Week	Session	Outcome
1	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss academic progress & wider reading
2	Presentation 1	Students to present the essay they have written on their wider reading and receive critique & feedback
3	Academic skills- brain training and memory techniques	To be able to digest and critique a large body of information at speed
4	Personal Statements 1- what is required in an Oxbridge PS?	To have an overview of the Oxbridge Personal statement requirements, to read and critique high quality Oxbridge personal statements
5	Academic overview- current affairs and general knowledge	To expand general knowledge and awareness of the world. To link current affairs to academic subject area. To write an essay and prepare a presentation for after the Easter break
6	How to create an argument: having an academic debate	To learn how to lead an academic debate, and present supported arguments

Summer A

Week	Session	Outcome
1	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss academic progress & wider reading
2	Voice Coach- how to speak within a tutorial	To understand how to present oneself in academic environments
3	Presentation 2	Students to present the essay they have written on their wider reading and receive critique & feedback
4	Oxbridge entrance tests- Example questions	To understand the requirements for your entrance test.
5	Personal Statement 2- how to discuss wider reading	To have an idea of wider reading required to enhance your personal statement. To prepare a complete first draft of your personal statement for after the half term break
6	Personal Statement 3- gaining wider knowledge and leadership experience in your subject area	To prepare for the summer break and research additional events in your subject outside of the school context.

Summer B

<u>Week</u>	<u>Session</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
1	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss Personal Statement
2	Critical thinking	How to critique and form an opinion on a body of information/ text- quickly!
3	Preparation for UCAS- expectations for deadlines and other university applications	To have an understanding of Russell group and elite universities. To understand the UCAS timescale and application process
4	Mock A level exams- drop in session only	-
5	Mock A level exams- drop in session only	-
6	Recap of the academic year and preparations for the summer break	To prepare for wider reading and subject experiences over the summer break, attend Oxbridge summer schools if applicable.

Autumn A

<u>Week</u>	<u>Session</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
1	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss Oxbridge application
2	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss Oxbridge application
3	Mock Entrance Tests	To take a mock entrance exam/ pre-interview assessment for your subject (if required)

4	Voice Coach- developing academic language	To debate on a subject in your field and current affairs to develop oral skills
5	Answering 'curve ball' questions!	Dealing with open ended and unusual questions in interviews
6	Being wrong/ accepting your limits in interview	To be able to discuss challenging ideas, and how to express uncertainty in interview

Autumn B

<u>Week</u>	<u>Session</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
1	Mock Interviews	To have completed a mock interview with the Head Teacher
2	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss Oxbridge application
3	Progress check	1:1 mentor meeting with Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene to review and discuss Oxbridge application
4	Presenting yourself at interview	To understand how to present confidently at interview
5	Interview practice- general knowledge practice questions	Developing critical thinking/ speak-thinking on the spot
6	Interview practice- subject specific questions	1:1 mock interview practice with teacher/ other pupils.

Section 5: General Expectations

The Teacher will:

- Provide a wide range of opportunities in school for students to be prepared for their applications
- Give pupils weekly sessions on Oxbridge study
- Organise interview practice sessions
- Arrange for Oxbridge alumni to visit the school to discuss their experiences
- Arrange events and trips to Oxbridge
- Provide information and resources from which students can extend their knowledge through independent study. (Notes which can be just learned off by heart will not be provided. The best learners are those that work on their own and conduct additional independent research).
- Set assignments to develop the students' love for their subject and wider reading
- Provide practice questions to prepare for entrance examinations
- Host individual tutorials to check progress and give support for each student's chosen options.

The Student will:

- Be punctual for all sessions
- Attend all weekly sessions and make up any work missed due to authorised absence.
- Notify Mr Cook/ Mrs Greene at least one day in advance of an absence for any sessions and the reason for doing so
- Bring all the necessary equipment to sessions
- Keep a tidy and up to date folder of all information given.
- Commit time to complete presentation assignments and wider reading
- Research their subject outside of the A level course, deepening knowledge
- Commit to their studies and prepare for mocks and their examinations so their attainment is on track to be accepted by Oxbridge.
- Participate in leadership opportunities within the school, assisting with lower year events and building up a portfolio of experience for their personal statements
- Develop and build on information given by using books, the internet or working with other students. Adopt an independent attitude and create a bank of detailed notes for revision.
- **ASK FOR HELP ON ANYTHING WHICH IS UNCLEAR ASAP AND DO NOT LEAVE THIS TO ONE WEEK BEFORE THE APPLICATION DEADLINE!!!**

“The whole purpose of education is to turn
mirrors into windows.”
– *Sydney J. Harris*