Advice for potential applicants to Oxford or Cambridge Universities
MGLC, Head of Scholars, Warwick School, 2011
Oxbridge advice for U5ths

A table of courses at Oxford and their entrance requirements as regards A levels can be found at [http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/courses/enreq.shtml](http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/courses/enreq.shtml).

Similar information, though not in tabular form, for Cambridge is at [http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/requirements/](http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/requirements/).

Please note that Oxford and Cambridge (like all good universities) are currently keen (i.e. under government pressure) to increase ‘accessibility’ from the maintained sector. This means that they cannot be seen to be excluding good pupils from applying simply because their school does not properly offer specific A levels. The requirements should be seen as designed to cater for this, and as absolute minimum requirements.

To give some examples:

- For Classics course at Oxford and Cambridge, neither Latin nor Greek A level an absolute requirement. This is aimed at making the course accessible to pupils at state schools where the classics are not offered. They are here, so you would not be a serious candidate without at least one of Latin or Greek.

- Similarly for modern languages only ONE ML A level is required. But we have a very strong language departments and tradition (both modern and classical), so it doesn’t exactly show much commitment and enthusiasm if you are only doing one language.

- Similarly for subjects where Further Mathematics is recommended: Cambridge Engineering says ‘Colleges are aware that not all schools offer Further Maths A-level, and will not discriminate against applicants who have not had the opportunity to take it. However, if your school or college is able to offer Further Maths, you are strongly encouraged to study this.’ – We do, so you must!

Entry for all subjects is extremely competitive. If you choose NOT to take a subject which is officially described as ‘Desirable’ or ‘Recommended’ you will clearly be putting yourself at a disadvantage compared to other candidates who will be doing these subjects (and will also have got lots of GCSE A* grades, high AS marks etc!).
Choosing Your AS and A levels?

Cambridge currently offers the following advice on choosing AS/A levels, at http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/docs/subjectmatters.pdf

Do you want to keep your options open?
Choosing subject combinations that genuinely keep your options open is trickier than you might think. We often encounter students who have chosen to take two arts and two science subjects at AS Level because they believe it will keep their options open. While such a subject combination does provide a suitable preparation for many arts and social science courses at the University it can make you a less competitive applicant for Cambridge’s broad-based science courses.

There are certain A Level subjects that are considered either essential or useful for a number of courses at Cambridge, therefore choosing one or more of these will help keep your higher education options open. These subjects include: **Chemistry**, **English Literature**, **History, languages, Mathematics** and **Physics**. Other subjects that also facilitate course choice at Cambridge include **Further Mathematics**† and **Biology**.

If you want to keep your options open but you think you are likely to want to study an arts/social science or science-based course at university please read our further advice overleaf. (Same website as mentioned just above).

Oxford does not currently offer similar advice, but it could be presumed to apply in much the same way there, and indeed at many of the best Russell Group universities (all of which are MORE competitive in terms of numbers of applicants than Oxbridge, e.g. Oxbridge about 4 applicants per place overall, Durham more like 12!!).

If you do know now that you would like apply to read a particular subject at Oxford or Cambridge, do feel free to see MGLC (CL3) to check that your choice of AS levels will give you the best possible chance.

MGLC, January 2011.
Considering Oxbridge?

- Oxford and Cambridge are the oldest and most prestigious universities in Britain.
- Tuition fees at Oxford and Cambridge are almost certain to be the same as other good universities, at the maximum (£9,000 per annum).
- By no means all subjects are offered, e.g. neither offers dentistry, politics (on its own), or marine biology, to name just three.
- Many combinations of subjects are offered, but others are not, e.g. you can study philosophy & physics, but not history & chemistry.
- Oxford and Cambridge are NOT the best universities for every subject.
- Being very good at sport gives you no advantage in getting in as an undergraduate (though it does as a graduate).
- Being very good at playing the organ or (if male) at singing does probably give you some advantage (via choral awards), but only at the most prestigious musical colleges (see separate sheet on choral awards).
- The courses on offer may have particular emphases which set them apart from other university courses, e.g. Oxford Law self-confessedly concentrates on topics of intellectual rather than practical importance. Theology courses at both O&C require study of ancient Greek (or a harder language such as Hebrew).
- Oxford, Cambridge and Durham are distinctive as ‘collegiate’ universities (London ‘Colleges’ are really separate universities)
- There is no such thing as an Oxbridge type in terms of personality (as a survey of teaching staff would prove!).
- Do remember that you will be living in the relevant town or city. Neither is a very logical choice if what you really want to do at university is mountaineering or sailing.
- Oxford is 45 mins from Warwick by road or rail. Cambridge is 2 hrs by road, 3hrs + by rail.

What you need in terms of grades:

**A level:** The vast majority of applicants across all subjects at Oxford and Cambridge will be predicted (or have achieved) straight As at A level. Last year Oxford and Cambridge each turned down 5,000 applicants who went on to get 3 As or better. Standard Cambridge offer is A*AA (but not counting A* in maths for candidates also doing further maths.) Oxford offers for most maths/science subjects will now include an A* in a maths/science subject.

**AS level:** Cambridge’s application form now asks for all module results, including UMS scores to be declared. CU reckons that UMS scores are a very good predictor of degree results and so take them very seriously, and are probably looking for averages of over 90%. Oxford’s application form does not ask for module results.

**GCSE:** To be a serious Oxbridge applicant one might expect to have 7 A* at GCSE, with the rest at A grade. Prospective medics will almost certainly need more. This does not mean that there is a formula, especially since Oxbridge admission is for a particular subject at a particular college. Tutors are well aware that an excellent scientist may well not have done well at arts subjects, or conversely that an excellent linguist could have struggled with science. Admissions tutors also have access to records for average results from a particular school.
NB on grades, see especially analysis of grades achieved by those offered places at Selwyn C, Cambridge for 2007. But also allow for continuing ‘grade inflation’!

What you need beyond grades:
Oxford and Cambridge no longer have nearly enough places to offer one to every pupil nationally who achieves straight As at GCSE and/or A level. The main things you need in addition are probably a genuine love of the subject you want to read and intellectual curiosity.

Check you are doing the right subjects:
Not totally obvious, e.g. Law A-level certainly not an advantage for Law. Oxford PPE (philosophy, politics, economics) does not require P, P or E, but does require mathematics. Cambridge Economics requires double maths. Check in prospectus (but read it critically - see my advice in bold on page 1 of this booklet) and/or with me.

What you don’t need:
The official policy on admissions at Oxford and Cambridge is that it is done purely on the basis of academic potential. Therefore extra-curricular interests or achievements are given no official importance. Again, however, it will vary from tutor to tutor, and fulfilling a large range of commitments may be taken as showing that one could cope well with the pressures of short but busy terms.

In recent years, 30 or more boys in the U6th have applied to Oxbridge, with about 12 each year receiving offers. Quite a few apply (or reapply) post A level with fairly similar rates of success.

MGLC, June 2006 (+ updated Hilary 2011)
Admission Statistics from Selwyn College
Applications for Autumn 2007 (mostly took finals in 2010)

Total applications: 448 (Arts: 292 Sciences: 156)
Total places: 110 (total offers: slightly more)

I would describe Selwyn as fairly good college. Medium-sized, not very old or new, quite near the town centre and very near the faculty buildings. It has been steadily improving its placing in the Tompkins table. The majority of this intake will have taken finals in 2010, when Selwyn was ranked 6th on the Tompkins table, so this group was probably slightly above average for Cambridge as a whole, but the figures for GCSE and AS marks of applicants and successful applicants did exactly reflect statistics for Cambridge overall in 2006/7.

The figures will inevitably hide significant variations from subject to subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A* grades</th>
<th>Applied %</th>
<th>= approx candidates*</th>
<th>Offered %</th>
<th>= approx candidates*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-11</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For candidates who had taken GCSE, the average number of A* grades was 6, but for those who received an offer, the average rises to 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UMS (average of 3 best/most relevant AS)</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>= approx candidates*</th>
<th>Offered</th>
<th>= approx candidates*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;79%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all candidates, the average was 88%, rising to 92% for those who received offers.
In Sept 2010, a study by Cambridge University concluded that there was a good correlation between UMS figures and final degree results (which is ultimately what colleges are interested in). Therefore admissions tutors will be placing even more emphasis on this aspect of your application (more than on GCSE A* grades, which, apparently, do not predict degree result well).

Inevitably one can expect a couple of percent ‘grade inflation’ between 2007 and present!

* The figures is grey were not provided by the college, but are my calculations. They are based on the college making very slightly more offers than places (I have guessed 10 extra offers overall). They also ignore the fact that some of the applicants did not do GCSE/AS level. They should however be roughly accurate in giving an idea of ratios, i.e. that overall just over half (78/152) candidates who applied with 8-11 A*, were given offers. The 65% figure means that two-thirds of those given offers have 8-11 GCSE A*.
Choosing a college at Oxford or Cambridge

Oxford and Cambridge are both ‘collegiate’ universities, in other words each is made up of around 30 individual colleges. Any student at the university has to be a member of (and therefore admitted by) an individual college. Each college is like a mini university, admitting each year around 120 students for 20-30 different subject groups. Colleges employ their own academic staff and have their own buildings and facilities for sport, music, drama, and often have particular strengths in non-academic areas (‘schools’/‘faculties’). The great advantage of the collegiate system is that you get to know a range of people doing different subjects and have a chance to do ‘extra-curricular activities’ at a college level that you would perhaps not have been able to do at a university level. The disadvantage is that admissions can seem a very daunting subject, since although there are university policies for individual subjects and sometimes even common tests, the colleges are fiercely independent and each individual college, and subject within a college, may well have its own idea of what it is looking for in an application and even apparent biases towards or against independent schools.

You do not have to choose a college. An ‘open application’ is possible at either university. In this case, your application will go to a college chosen by computer allocation. Open applications have the same overall statistical rate of success. About 20% of successful applicants are accepted by a college they did not choose. The vast majority are extremely happy. Nonetheless, I would not really recommend an open application, since -

the choice of college is important for two main reasons:

- You may be able slightly to improve your chances of being accepted.
- Much more importantly because your college will probably be the centre of your social life for your 3 or 4 years at university. A small number of students will devote themselves to university-based activities such as blues sport or the Union, or to their subject faculty. A far greater number will live, eat, drink, socialise, play sport or music, and study almost entirely within their college. Some will even marry someone from the same college!

How to choose a college:
There are about 30 colleges at each university. Some colleges are only for mature students/graduates. You cannot apply to these. Nor to New Hall = Murray Edwards C, or Newnham (Cambridge) which only admit women. All Oxford colleges are now mixed (St. Hilda’s from 2008). Not all colleges take students for all subjects. See the prospectuses for details.

➢ Read through my very quick profiles of the colleges.
➢ Read through the college profiles in the internet or paper prospectus, remembering that they are written by people who want to attract applicants to that college or even by people whose job it is to do so!
http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/
http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/colleges/
➢ You should also read some prospectuses produced by individual colleges (with the same caveat). You might also want to read the ‘alternative prospectus’ produced by students at most colleges,

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1 Harris Manchester (Oxford), Hughes Hall, Lucy Cavendish, St. Edmund’s, Wolfson (Cambridge)
remembering that these are usually written by a single individual or small clique who may or may not represent what the students think!

- Email a question to subject tutors at series of short-listed colleges. See how quickly/well they answer (suggested by a Cambridge admissions tutor)

You might consider some or all of the following:
- Is the college unusually large or small?
- Is it mainly old or new, and central or placed slightly outside the city?
These usually go together. For some, part of the point of going to Oxbridge would be lost at a college built entirely in the 1970s, but all colleges have at least some modern accommodation. The most famous, city centre colleges attract hordes of tourists. Newer colleges away from the centre may be quieter and have more pleasant grounds.
- The non-academic reputation of the college.
Sporting, musical, dramatic etc. But all colleges have sports teams and also plenty of people who will never go near their college sports ground.
- The academic reputation of the college.
For this see the Norrington/Tompkins table. But also remember that colleges may be particularly strong or relatively weak in individual subjects.

You should probably not consider
- Statistics relating to %ages of applicants/acceptances from independent schools.
- The status or public profile of the subject tutor at the college.
Professors traditionally do much more teaching of graduates than undergraduates, so are unlikely to teach you anyway. Academics (‘fellows/dons’) have frequent periods of study leave, and much tutorial teaching is done by lecturers or graduates rather than college ‘fellows’. Dons with a high public profile may well do less teaching than others.
- Whether a college and subject had an especially small or large number of applicants last year, or the breakdown of male/female applicants.
(The statistic is just as likely to be reversed as repeated the following year)

You should certainly
- Speak to the relevant teacher(s) at school to get advice about your choice.
The school may well have a ‘track-record’ from previous good and bad students in a particular subject at a particular college which might help or hinder your application. Remember also that your application will itself add to that record and affect current and future pupils at Warwick!
- Visit the college to which you are intending to apply and speak to the/tutor in your subject, and visit at least one other college so that you have a point of comparison.
Oxford and Cambridge run both subject open days and college open days. Those taking place during or immediately after university full term (i.e. May or June) will allow you to meet current students and give you a far better feel for the college than visits in the long vacation when the colleges are full of conferences and/or summer schools. Asking for a prospectus at a college lodge should always gain you entry to look round a college. By far the best reason for applying to a college is that you like the feel of it when you visit.
If you meet a subject tutor, think whether you would like to be taught by him/her for potentially the next 3 or 4 years. If you definitely would not, don’t apply there!

Finally, do not worry too much about choice of college. All colleges are small enough to make it easy to get to know people, but big enough for there to be people of similar interests, backgrounds etc. And the vast majority of students really enjoy college life, no matter which college they are at. There are also literally hundreds of university-wide clubs and societies.

A very brief snapshot of Cambridge Colleges.

What follows is deliberately very brief and is inevitably subjective. Its purpose is to provide, via the ‘stereotype’ a glimpse of what the college is like. This can be used to narrow down choices. You should certainly use this information in conjunction with my advice on how to choose a college.

Current students at Oxford/Cambridge are the best possible source of advice about what their college is like (NOT only for their subject) and about what other colleges are like for their subject. If there is currently someone at Oxford/Cambridge doing your subject, or someone at a college you are seriously considering, arrange a visit if you can.
CHRIST’S

Stereotype: Academic – regularly at/near top of Tompkins Table

CHURCHILL

Stereotype: New, away from centre, science-orientated.

College: CLARE

Stereotype: Beautiful, central and a top tourist attraction. Traditionally quite high on Tompkins table, though middling for past 4 years.

College: CORPUS CHRISTI

Stereotype: The smallest Oxbridge college, one of the oldest.

College: DOWNING

Stereotype: Very middling! Neither old not new, quite central, medium-sized, middle of Tompkins table.

College: EMMANUEL

Stereotype: Usually near top of Tompkins table
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Stereotype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FITZWILLIAM</td>
<td>Newish, large site, lower half of Tompkins table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIRTON</td>
<td>Large, ex-women’s college, 2 miles from Cambridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONVILLE &amp; CAIUS</td>
<td>Very old &amp; beautiful; right in centre of Cambridge; touristy. Quite high in Tompkins table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOMERTON</td>
<td>“Teacher training college”. In fact this college does admit students for almost every subject, each with its own DoS (though many only for the first time in 2006/7/8). It will feel and look different from most colleges: being quite a way from the centre, and with quite a number of graduates doing a PGCE (1-year teacher-training course). Who would want to socialize with them?! Certainly the best place for an education degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hughes Hall</td>
<td>You can’t apply here as this college is only for undergraduates over 21.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESUS</td>
<td>Middling on Tompkins table. Good location: near centre, but not visited by tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KING’S</td>
<td>The iconic view of Cambridge is King’s College Chapel, so the whole world wants to go there to visit or study! Takes 90% of its students from state schools (the same proportion as apply). Usually in bottom half of Tompkins table.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College: Lucy Cavendish
You can’t apply here as this college is only for women over 21.

College: MAGDALENE
Stereotype: The typical Oxbridge stereotype of a college (‘Porterhouse Blue’) – male, rowdy, drunk a lot, rugger-playing is relatively true of Magdalene. Usually fairly low in Tompkins table.

College: NEW HALL (Now Called MURRAY EDWARDS)
Stereotype: Women’s College (not a stereotype - it really does only take women). Bottom of Tompkins Table

College: NEWNHAM
Stereotype: Women’s College (not a stereotype- it really does only take women). Low on Tompkins Table

College: PEMBROKE
Stereotype: Old and pretty. Very central, but avoids being a complete tourist trap. Usually top third of Tompkins table.

College: PETERHOUSE
Stereotype: Old and small. Very central, but avoids being a complete tourist trap. Recently has been consistently near the bottom of Tompkins table.

College: QUEENS’ (note plural)
Stereotype: Large and beautiful site (straddles the river with its famous mathematical bridge). Usually top half of Tompkins table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROBINSON</td>
<td>Very, very new (opened 1981, endowed by David Robinson of Robinson (TV) Rental). Near the arts/social science faculties. Bottom half of Tompkins table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST. CATHARINE’S</td>
<td>Small and central main site, though medium-sized as a college. Previously around middle of Tompkins table, but last three years near top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Edmund’s</td>
<td>You can’t apply here as this college is only for undergraduates over 21.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST JOHN’S</td>
<td>Huge, enormously wealthy. Beautiful site, straddling the Cam. Famous for its choir. Surprisingly NOT in top half of Tompkins table recently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELWYN</td>
<td>Fairly new (late Victorian), but the spacious site is now right next to the main arts/social sciences area. Traditionally a good ‘average’ college – middle sized, middle-ranking: more recently it has been quite high on the Tompkins table. Seems to be trying very hard to be school-friendly – sent very detailed profile of their 2007 applicants (see separate sheet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDNEY SUSSEX</td>
<td>Opposite Sainsbury’s! Quite old, attractive and central, though not on tourist track. Smallish in size. Bottom half of Tompkins table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRINITY</td>
<td>Easily the largest and the wealthiest Oxbridge college. Probably also the most famous, most visited, most beautiful etc. Traditionally very academic (huge list of Nobel laureates) and enormous college library (designed by Wren).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
College: TRINITY HALL

Stereotype: Not to be confused with Trinity! It is next to it, smaller and older. A much more ‘normal’ college.

College: Wolfson
You can’t apply here as this college is only for undergraduates over 21 or research students.

MGLC
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BALLIOL</td>
<td>Old. Boasts about the number of Prime Ministers who studied there (including Blair). Quite large and academic. Large site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRASENOSE (BNC)</td>
<td>Pleasant, central, medium-sized, quite sporty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRIST CHURCH</td>
<td>Relatively large, rather ‘public school’. College chapel is Oxford’s Cathedral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORPUS CHRISTI</td>
<td>Very small and pretty (through only taking students for a small range of subjects), academic, especially on arts side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXETER</td>
<td>Fairly ‘average’. Very central, middle sized. Position on Norrington table seems to fluctuate wildly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College: Harris Manchester**  
You can’t apply here as this college is only for students over 21.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Stereotype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HERTFORD</td>
<td>Another good ‘average’ college. Central.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESUS</td>
<td>Welsh (but that really is just a stereotype). Another good ‘average’ college with central location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINCOLN</td>
<td>Fairly ‘average’. Very central, slightly smaller than average sized. Position on Norrington table seems to fluctuate wildly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGDALEN</td>
<td>Old and beautiful with cloisters, right by the river. Famous choir celebrates May day. Slightly ‘stuck-up’? Has its own deer park (I don’t know why).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANSFIELD</td>
<td>Is that a college? Only since 1995 and only does a limited range of subjects (e.g. NOT Biology, Classics, Chemistry, ML). Very small, recruits mainly from state schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERTON</td>
<td>Old(est?), traditional, academic. Keen to build on musical tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Stereotype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEW</strong></td>
<td>Very old with cloisters! (founded 1379 (but newer than the other college officially named after the Virgin Mary, ‘Oriel’, hence universally known as New College). Relatively large. Famous choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORIEL</strong></td>
<td>Old (see comments on New College above). Relatively small. Keen on rowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEMBROKE</strong></td>
<td>Broke. (Still doesn’t accommodate all its quite large number of students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The QUEEN’S</strong></td>
<td>Northern. Central location. Relatively small. Lower half of Norrington table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ST ANNE’S</strong></td>
<td>Large, quite normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ST CATHERINE’S (ST CATZ)</strong></td>
<td>Funny modern architecture (most of the college from buildings to cutlery planned as a unit in the 1960s). Sporty. Large and away from centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ST EDMUND HALL (Teddy Hall)</strong></td>
<td>Lively, quite hearty. Old, central and large.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ST HILDA’S</strong></td>
<td>Women only. It was founded to promote women’s education, but admitted first men in 2007, because it was often near the bottom of Norrington table, and regularly had fewer first-choice applicants than places. In fact it was a very happy and successful college with a lovely site on the river. Now all years mixed, but all tutors female!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Stereotype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST HUGH’S</td>
<td>Well away from centre of things. Relatively new (late Victorian, founded as women’s college, mixed since 1986). Often near bottom of Norrington table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST JOHN’S</td>
<td>Very wealthy and generous college. Academic. Beautiful gardens. Pretty sports ground (like almost all colleges, not on site).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST PETER’S</td>
<td>Not very academic. Fairly central.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMERVILLE</td>
<td>Isn’t that women only? No – fully mixed since 1998, and now a good ‘middling’ college. Founded 1879, but in a fairly central location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRINITY</td>
<td>Small college (student numbers) but large, central and spacious site. A good ‘average’ college, though very much on the tourist trail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY (UNIV)</td>
<td>Slightly larger than average. Very old. Central. Active college societies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WADHAM</td>
<td>A large college. Quite old and central. ‘Active college students’ union’ is prospectus code for ‘lefty’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>WORCESTER</td>
<td>Slightly larger than average. Moderately old (1714). Set slightly away from centre in its own lovely grounds, with lake and on-site sports field.</td>
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UCAS Section 10
From an Oxbridge perspective

The following was shown at a conference for Higher Education advisers in Cambridge in September 2007 and almost exactly repeated at a similar Cambridge conference and an Oxford 'Teachers’ Open Day’ in 2010.

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How do we (i.e. Subject and admissions tutors at Cambridge) use personal statements?

- To confirm appropriateness of chosen subject and course
- As an embarkation-point for discussion at interview
- Subject focus
- Reading and other wider exploration
- Work experience (where relevant to course)
- Personal statements must be both honest and personal
- Extra-curricular activities/positions of responsibility (see

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It was stressed that the work experience section is only where directly relevant to a vocational course, e.g. medicine, veterinary med, engineering, architecture.

It was also stressed that they ARE NOT INTERESTED in the x-ca section (it was on the slide to reassure people that they do expect this stuff to be on PS – i.e. you don’t NOT put this stuff down simply because Cambridge (or Oxford) is one of your choices.

The speaker was asked about using quotations. The initial response was that it would depend on the quotation, the tutor reading it, the rest of the statement. When pressed he suggested that it was probably better NOT to use quotations, if only because it is meant to be a personal statement.

MGLC, All-Hallows Eve, 2007
The Oxbridge Interview

There are a great many weird and largely apocryphal stories about Oxbridge interviews which you will probably be told by largely well-meaning people either before you go up for interview or while you are there. Ignore these tales. They will often be from a different period when applicants for all subjects had already sat two or more three-hour exam papers, and when tutors were less concerned about stories of Oxbridge eccentricity reaching the newspapers and being seized upon by populist politicians. The vast majority of tutors now take interviews very seriously indeed as the best way of differentiating between excellent and (merely) very good candidates. They are even expected to go on courses on how to interview!

Oxford and Cambridge both publish booklets / a video Oxford advice and booklet also at http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/interviews/ Cambridge advice and online video at http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/interviews/ You will probably want to look at these materials and there probably isn’t much difference between an O/C interview.

Take notice of advice about body language, but don’t worry about it for Oxbridge. Tutors really are looking for the brightest students, not polished PR (wo)men. If you get in, you will certainly meet students (and possibly tutors!) who would never have got into Oxbridge otherwise (they may well struggle to find a normal job, though!).

Even if you do not do so regularly, it is probably worth trying to follow the news (quality newspapers or Radio 4 Today or PM will offer more analysis than TV news) both for any subject-specific stories that might occur and for the general question that you might get.

Do make sure that you take with you a copy of your UCAS statement, extra O/C statement and any work you were asked to submit. Interviews will very often take something in these as the starting point. They may well also ask about things you wrote in any pre-interview test.

Do not be afraid to admit that you don’t know something. If you try to bluff you will certainly be found out and will tie yourself in knots. If you find yourself trying to defend a position that is clearly daft, the best thing to do is to admit as much.

Do not rush straight into answering a difficult question, for fear of leaving a short silence.

At interview tutors are looking for:

- Genuine interest in the subject/course
- Enthusiasm for complex and challenging ideas
- Intellectual flexibility, i.e. being able to think about things from a different perspective
- Clarity of thought and analytical ability.

Take careful note of anything you may have learnt from open day, letter of invitation to interview or prospectus about what your college may ask in an interview. My college tutors actually said at the open day that the first question at interview would be what aspect of classics would you most like to be able
to study at university. I did not remember this until they reminded me of this at my actual interview 6 months later, which wasn’t a very good start!

Tutors will not dress up for interviewing. Some will therefore look smart, most will not, and some will look like hippies who didn’t grow up. You, however, should look smart, i.e. your school suits with a fairly discreet shirt & (non-school) tie. Some colleges will say that candidates are not expected to wear a suit. They say this so no one feels they have to go out to buy a suit specially for interview, and so they can’t be accused of being elitist. Since you all have a suit, you should probably wear it.

It is more or less impossible to tell how well an interview has gone. If anything, a really difficult interview may actually have gone very well, and an easy interview quite badly. This is because tutors are more likely to seek to stretch a good candidate with more challenging questions.

**Remember also that the interview is only one of many things that tutors will be looking for, and that it is no more important than GCSE/AS grades, or admissions tests.**

**Oxford second interviews / Cambridge ‘pool’**

Someone only interviewed at the one Oxford college is probably a clear decision (which may of course mean straight in or straight out). Being ‘passed around’ may mean that you might be marginal for your college choice but possibly worth a place elsewhere. In December 2010, some applicants were told they had been pooled and offered interviews at other colleges, and were explicitly told But in the past applicants have been passed around as a sort of ‘quality control’ and to make sure that the overall university admissions process is as fair as possible.

The ‘pooling’ system at Cambridge is more obvious, in that it does mean you have been rejected by your first choice college, but thought good enough to be worth a place at Cambridge, if some other college is short of good applicants. Anyone with 7 or more A* at GCSE and an average ‘best 3’ of 92%+ on AS will almost certainly be pooled, if not given an offer at their first-choice college. You can certainly be fished out of the pool, and offered a place at another college, or even pooled by your college and then accepted by that college!

Do make use of the undergraduate helpers who will be on hand to offer tea & sympathy where necessary. There will almost certainly be a designated helper for each subject at each college.

Every year at every college there will be an applicant who takes the chance of staying overnight in a college with a licensed bar as the opportunity to get paralytically drunk. Do not be this person, no matter how well or badly you may think your interview went (see above).

Do check the college notice board (usually next to the porter’s lodge) regularly to see if you have been called for interviews elsewhere. But do not go to the other extreme of spending your two days sitting miserably in your room, checking the notice every five minutes: do take the chance to see something of Oxford or to visit people at other colleges.

**Practicalities (O & C)**
The train from Coventry/Leamington/Banbury will take you to platform 1 at Oxford. Simply go through the main station concourse, out down the steps and keep heading in the same direction for the centre of Oxford (definitely not worth taking a bus).

Similarly leaving Cambridge station by the main (only?) exit also leads you in the right direction, but it probably is worth taking a bus to the city centre.

**A CONDITIONAL offer, not a place!**
Remember that even if you are successful you won’t get the legendary two-E offer: this was given at the time when the formal entrance exams & interview were being used and was thus a standard offer, not something reserved for geniuses! Cambridge’s usual offer is now A*AA, with A* in mathematics not counting if you are doing further maths. Oxford is now also requiring A*AA for most science/maths subjects, but AAA for all arts and humanities subjects.

MGLC, updated Hilary Term, 2011
Norrington Table.

This table places Oxford colleges in rank order according to the average class of degree awarded to its final-year students. For many years up to 2004, the information was collected from published lists by enterprising students who sold it to newspapers. From 2005 the table has been complied and published by the university. The information is useful in providing an idea of which colleges admit the best or least good students, especially when colleges are consistently near the top, middle or bottom of the table. But the tables can and do hide individual strengths and weaknesses in different subjects at different colleges.

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Tompkins Table

This table places Cambridge colleges in rank order according to the average class of degree awarded to its final-year students. The information is collected from lists published by the university by an accountant, Mr Tompkins for the Independent newspaper. The information is useful in providing an idea of which colleges admit the best or least good students, especially when colleges are consistently near the top, middle or bottom of the table. But the tables can and do hide individual strengths and weaknesses in different subjects at different colleges.

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<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selwyn</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney Sussex</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cathearine's</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John's</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Hall</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colleges which only admit mature students are not included. Women’s colleges in pink. New Hall is now officially called Murray Edwards.

* Homerton College has only recently started admitted enough undergraduates for subjects other than education to be worth including.

MGLC, Lent, 2011
Arts/Humanities Courses NOT requiring specific A levels.

Successful applicants for these courses will need to satisfy tutors that they are Oxbridge material academically and that they have as much genuine interest in the subject(s) in question as for subjects which more obviously relate to school curriculum.

Some subjects vary quite significantly from the overall Oxbridge average of applicants per place (= 4 per place overall). In many cases college variations will make the picture even more extreme. This will affect ‘how easy it is to get in’ less than one might think. Small subjects are now administered centrally, so if c. 60 apply for Arch&Anth for c.25 places, the department will assess all the candidates centrally, and will take the best 25, even if they had all by chance applied for the same college. Some of the larger and apparently more competitive subjects have inflated application figures precisely because anyone can apply irrespective of A levels, and they also get quite a lot of unrealistic applications from UK and abroad.

**Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (ASNC) (Cam – small; 2.2 per place)**

Various languages connected with ‘Old English’. Like all Oxbridge ‘ab initio’ languages, for very good linguists who can go from scratch, at start of course, to reading and doing literary criticism on *Beowulf* by the end of the FIRST year. Might appeal to A-level linguists (modern or classical) who want to do something different, and/or to English students who have really enjoyed Chaucer.

**Archaeology & Anthropology (Ox – v. small; 2.5 per place)**

(Cam – small; 2.3 per place)

Can appear statistically ‘an easy route’. More the case that it has different skills and applicants: just being quite a good candidate who fancies the look of the course will NOT be good enough. You need to have, and be able to show, a serious commitment to archaeology in particular (e.g. have been on several digs, not just visited Greece or Stonehenge).

**Education (Cam – medium; 2.5 per place)**

A strange, and arguably non-academic subject. Essentially a course for those thinking of teaching at primary level. The normal way into secondary teaching is to do a normal academic subject then a PGCE.

**History of Art (Cam – v. small; 4 per place)**

(Ox – new course (2005); v.v. small)

Wonderful if you’ve always been fascinated by Western Art and culture generally, and have something more to say than just ‘That’s a nice picture’. You must be a museums and art galleries sort of person, and have read and enjoyed Gombrich, *The Story of Art*. You can’t understand Western Art without some knowledge of Classical Mythology and the Bible.

**Human Sciences (Ox – small; 3 per place)**

An attempt at a course combining sciences and humanities. Biology A-level described as ‘helpful’ rather than ‘essential’ or ‘recommended’, though in fact the course seems to include fairly serious biological topics, as well as several more akin to geography and others on anthropology/sociology.

**Land Economy (Cam – v. small; 5 per place)**
Traditionally a course to teach the sons of landed gentry how to manage their estates. And still has, but is trying to get rid of, this reputation. It does still widely have a reputation as attracting and accepting candidates who were less strong academically than for most other subjects. (With at least some justification 10 years ago.)

**Law (= Jurisprudence Ox)**

(Ox – large; 5 per place) *(more for Law with Europe)*

(Cam – large; 6 per place)

Absolutely DON’T need to have studied law A level, even at schools where this is offered. NOR do you need to be committed to a career in law – neither course qualifies you to practise law immediately. Both are concerned with the academic side of law, rather than the practical (e.g. Jurisprudence still includes mandatory study of Roman law). Oxford requires candidates to take the LNAT paper (Law National Assessment Test) as do other top Law schools: Cambridge is adopting its own admissions test from 2010.

**Philosophy**

(Cam – small; 6 per place)

Oxford, which is certainly the best place to study philosophy anywhere, does not offer straight philosophy because it is too difficult to get a grasp of without relating it to some ‘solid’ subject. You will need to have read as widely as possible in philosophy, and be good at thinking and writing.

**Politics, Philosophy & Economics (PPE)**

(Ox – very large; 5 per place)

A unique and world-famous degree course, read by many political leaders from UK and elsewhere (Harold Wilson, Benazir Bhutto, Imran Khan: Bill Clinton apparently claimed to have read PPE, though he did not!). Does NOT officially require A levels in any of its constituent subjects. This is because many schools do not offer all or any of these subjects. As WS does, it would be very strange to apply without at least one of these A levels.

**Social and Political Sciences (SPS)**

(Cam – medium; 6.7 per place)

A more or less unique combination of politics, psychology, sociology (including social anthropology). Probably doesn’t have quite the prestige or the reputation of Oxford PPE for training wannabe politicians.

**Theology**

(Ox – smallish; 3 per place)

(Cam – small; 3 per place)

Most have done RS, but not particularly an advantage – looking for breadth of interest, and essay based-subjects (though arts & science mix OK too). At both O&C the course includes compulsory study of a
scriptural language. In most cases ancient Greek, since although this is hard, Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit are harder, and the courses are based around Judaeo-Christian theology. However students include all religious beliefs and none.
Some Notes on Other Oxbridge Subjects

Classics
Both O & C will stress that it is not essential to have taken A levels in Latin or Greek. (But Latin OR Greek is still described as ‘highly desirable’) This is to avoid elitism and cater for people at (the great majority of UK) schools where no classics is offered. Tutors will know that we are a school that does still seriously offer both, and would take a very dim view of someone applying from WS without Latin or Greek (either is fine, both is a definite advantage).

Oriental Studies (includes Arabic/Islamic; Persian; Chinese, Japanese, Egyptology, Sanskrit, Hebrew, South Asian).
Beware: Cambridge have (disgracefully) closed down several of their less popular options to concentrate on ‘growth’ areas of Chinese, Arabic & Japanese.
All of these courses involve learning a difficult ancient or modern language, so although they are not officially required, you would be very unwise to apply without evidence that you are a good ancient or modern linguist (e.g. A levels OR actual experience in a language)

Modern Languages
Both Oxford and Cambridge offer very traditional modern language courses, in which the emphasis is very much on studying great literature. Learning Italian (vocab, grammar, syntax) is simply the means to the end of reading Dante, Petrach or Calvino. The year abroad will take care of the practical, oral and aural side. So although there are language classes, the main thrust of your work each week will be to read some great literature in the original, read secondary criticism on it, probably largely in English and then to write your tutorial essay, certainly in English.

For you to want to do this course, you need to like literature. Tutors are aware than A level courses include virtually no study of set texts (if you are doing a classical language A-level, they will ask you at interview about that set text!), but will expect evidence (UCAS or interview) that you have read some literary classics in translation, and ideally a small amount in the original language. See your ML teacher for advice about this.

It is possible to apply with just one language A level, but if you know you want to apply for ML, do two or even three!

Economics
Possible as a single subject only at Cambridge (Oxford does PPE or Economics and Management or Engineering, Economics and Management). A Cambridge tutor in a closely related subject has described Cambridge Economics to me as ‘Applied Statistics’. In other words it is very heavily mathematical in content. To be a serious candidate you need to be doing double maths, with as many stats modules as possible. You should also be doing economics, and history is what they would most like as a fourth subject. It is very competitive.

English: Extremely competitive!
Oxbridge Medicine

Getting a place for medicine anywhere is tough. At Oxbridge it is not tough x2, but tough\(^2\). (where (for mathematical pedants) ‘tough’ > 2)

So the usual comments about being a decent candidate with 6A* at GCSE and 90% average UMS at AS level simply do not apply. You are almost certainly below average with this level for medicine! In recent years,

1 successful applicant (Cam) had 9A* and 98% average in best 3 AS
3 unsuccessful applicants (all Ox) averaged 8.6A* and 92.3% AS

Cambridge expects to take people who are both brilliant and hard-working enough to complete the medical course in 2 years and then do something completely different in the third year, e.g. law or philosophy (though you can do the third year in a pure science discipline)!

Both universities require candidates to take the BMAT test.

At Oxford, even to make the interview stage, you need to reach a certain score (not disclosed) on a combination of percentage of GCSEs in which you got an A*, compared to other pupils at WS and BMAT %age. This hurdle reduces the field from 7 the applicants per place who apply to around 2.5 per place of those who are interviewed.

Cambridge deselects fewer candidates after the BMAT test (normal applications 5 per place). The following specific advice on this came from Pembroke College, Cambridge, review of admissions for 2007/8

‘Agreement has been reached on criteria for the pre-selection of candidates in Medicine, based on a combination of GCSE scores, AS module scores, and BMAT scores. Most successful candidates for Medicine have a minimum of 7A* at GCSE, an average of over 90% in AS modules in three relevant subjects and at least two B grades in the BMAT. If two out of three scores are significantly below this, then a medical candidate may not be called for interview.’

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Oxford and Cambridge medical faculties would both place a great deal of emphasis in their course on academic rather than simply practical skills. They would both regard themselves as training people who will be at the forefront of medical research (and perhaps even ethics) in 20 years’ time. They are not training people ‘just’ to be good GPs or even surgeons. If you intend to pursue a career in general medicine, Oxbridge is not the right place anyway.

Oxford Medicine is not one of the Oxford science/maths subjects which will now be setting a standard conditional offer to include one A* at A-level.
Sciences

“If you’re interested in science you have to have the math (sic – American spelling) – AND a good sense of math.” (Don Porcelli, Tutor in Earth Sciences, St. Anne’s College, Oxford, at a teachers’ conference, June 2010.

Oxford splits its science courses into individual subjects: Biological sciences, Biochemistry, Chemistry, Physics. Cambridge combines all its science into Natural Sciences (NatSci), though they then subdivide this into Biological Sciences and Physical Sciences

Cambridge Science

NatSci
This is a very prestigious course (almost certainly the most famous science course in the world). It is therefore more competitive than the Oxford single science courses, and seems to demand a great deal of science/mathematics. To give yourself the best chance you need to be doing the following at A2(probably in the order below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Sciences</th>
<th>Biological Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Biology / Physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Maths</td>
<td>(some Further Maths)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experience suggests that at interview, questions often focus on the science NOT being studied at A level!
Mathematics is essential: you get a choice of 3 from 7 scientific topics in the first year, AND HAVE TO DO a course in mathematics.

Director of Admissions at Cambridge said (September 2007 and September 2010)
For broad-based science courses there is some benefit in doing 4 subjects at A2
For mathematics, Computer Science, Engineering, Physical NatSci, there is a clear benefit in doing Further Maths and 3 other subjects
(3xA2 + 2xAS ≠ 4xA2)

e.g. for Mathematics or Engineering, double mathematics and physics at A2 is NOT enough, but this with e.g. French is fine. (The reason is that tutors will expect good applicants to be good enough at mathematics for the standard A level to be fairly easy to achieve.)

Many colleges expect candidates to take the TSA while in Cambridge. An admissions tutor in NatSci commented that high or low marks in this test, i.e. c 80% or c. 40% are significant, but scores in between do not tell much about the candidate.
In January 2011, Oxford announced (apparently to the press, before it appeared on the university website!) that the standard offer for most (but not, apparently all) science/maths subjects would be A*AA. These subjects are: Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Computing, Engineering (and joint schools), Mathematics (and joint schools) and Physics (and joint schools).

Earth Sciences will offer A*AA or AAAA.

Offers seem set to remain at AAA for medicine and biochemistry, at least for this year.

**Chemistry**
The key point to note about this course is that it is fairly mathematical in content. The 2008 prospectus lists maths A level as ‘recommended’ – i.e. highly desirable to study – if not please check with individual colleges about applying. A footnote says ‘although not formally required only a very small number of students are admitted each year without A-level mathematics.’

**Physics**
You should be doing physics and double mathematics. (Further maths does not appear in the ‘essential’ column because Oxford does not want to seem to discriminate against (state) schools which do not offer further maths. The Physics Aptitude Test seems to be used to reject weaker physicists even before interview.

**Biology**
**Biochemistry**

**Biomedical Sciences**

**Earth Sciences**
This is a small but expanding subject, which is trying to get rid of its old title of ‘geology’. It wants not to be a part of geography, but a version of Cambridge Physical Natural Sciences. Its publicity quite explicitly states that it’s looking for people who are doing double maths, physics and chemistry at A level. This subject now requires A*AA OR AAAA at A-level.
Oxbridge Choral Awards

In addition to their normal subject application (any subject except for medicine), candidate may apply for a choral award at most O/C colleges. If successful, they will go to O/C as a choral scholar, contracted to sing at college chapel services, for a small annual payment and/or free music lessons.

Choral Foundations

Between them, Oxford and Cambridge have five colleges with ‘Choral Foundations’. In each case they are associated with a school or choir school which provides boys to sing in the choir. Their choirs are thus entirely male-voice, and so female students cannot apply for choral awards at these colleges. Anyone who can sing countertenor properly may thus be at some advantage! The current order of the top five ‘professional’ choirs in terms of their reputation and prestige would, in my opinion, be:

- King’s College, Cambridge (Stephen Cleobury)
- New College, Oxford (Edward Higginbottom)
- St. John’s College, Cambridge (Andrew Nethsingha – young, recently appointed & not yet famous)
- Madgalen College, Oxford (Daniel Hyde)
- Christ Church, Oxford (Stephen Darlington)

The gaps are intentional: King’s probably is way out ahead, if only because of its Nine Lessons and Carols service on Christmas Eve, and because of its chapel. The Directors of Music at King’s and New are extremely distinguished. St John’s, C, has an exceptionally distinguished tradition, but a recent director who is not well known and new director of music starting in 2007.

If you are good enough vocally to be accepted by one of these choirs, you give yourself an advantage in applying to the university\(^2\), since you will ‘only’ need to show that you are good enough academically to be worth a place (whereas all other applicants will have to do this AND be better than some or many other applicants (depending on where and what they are applying for)).

If you are not good enough vocally (or are not the best 1/2 for your particular voice) you will still be considered for your academic subject according to the normal procedure.

In a sense, therefore, applying to a choral foundation gives you an extra chance, but you will be on a contract and be expected to do a great deal of practice, with services almost every day. Singing in the choir would be probably your main social life. (Don’t forget though that for arts subjects, you may well have only have perhaps 3/4 hours of compulsory teaching per week.)

Other Colleges

Almost every other college at O/C has a chapel and college choir, and offers choral awards (usually the same small amount *per annum* as the choral foundations!). This time they are for female S/A and male

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\(^2\) Both universities seem wary of saying this openly, though the Cambridge foundations explicitly say they make their decisions before the main admissions procedure. Oxford foundations imply it. New College says ‘with singing very much taken into account when decisions on admissions are made.’
T/B. Most of these will perform evensong Wed & Sun only, with probably just the rehearsals beforehand. Some will do the odd professional recording or choir trips (can depend on the individual organ scholar so hard to predict). Being good enough to get a choral award at one of these non-choral-foundation colleges is quite unlikely to help you get in academically.

So roughly speaking, in terms of advantages and disadvantages:

**Cambridge**
Apply to King’s and/or SJC only
+ fantastic musical opportunities
+ small £ scholarship, bigger opportunities for making some money as a result of recordings, concerts, singing at May Balls etc
+ easier admission for subject
- huge workload
- may not be best college for you personally / your subject

Apply to other colleges for choral award
+ good musical opportunities
+ you can choose the college you actually want to go to
- no advantage in admission
- choir commitment (whereas you can join as a non-scholar too)

**Oxford**
Apply to New, Magdalen or Christ Church
+ fantastic musical opportunities
+ small £ scholarship, bigger opportunities for making some money as a result of recordings, concerts, singing at Balls etc
+ easier admission for subject
+ ‘choral decision’ made very early, so if not accepted musically, you can make normal UCAS application, including to Cambridge (but not for choral award) or to a different Oxford college
- huge workload

Apply to other colleges for choral award
+ good musical opportunities
+ you can more or less choose the college you actually want to go to
- no advantage in admission
- choir commitment (whereas you can join as a non-scholar too)
- some colleges not part of Oxford choral awards scheme

Or - Don’t apply for a choral award at all – both O/C

Still excellent musical opportunities (3/4 excellent full orchestras at each university; dozens of choirs, including college choirs; Opera societies, G&S societies. Hundreds of other extra curricular societies and sports on a college and university basis.
Can be far more flexible in what else you do and when you do it (e.g. around exam-time).

**Deadlines**
The university deadlines for applications for choral awards (and for Cambridge for extra Cambridge application form) are *significantly earlier* than for normal entry. (1 Sept – Oxford, early Sept Cambridge, i.e. they need to be done in the summer holiday.

This has important practical school consequences – the following would need to know that you are at least likely to apply (might depend on AS modules admittedly) by a week before the end of the summer term (about time of main Oxford open days, and before Cambridge ones!). Form tutor; JNJ; GNF; TGB.

MGLC November 2007 & Advent 2009
### An Oxbridge Miscellany

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oxford</th>
<th>Cambridge</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quads</td>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>A set of buildings on four sides of an open area, usually grassed (Don’t walk across the grass!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td>Supervisions</td>
<td>The main teaching system usually involving a tutor discussing an essay with 1/2 students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaelmas</td>
<td>Michaelmas</td>
<td>Autumn term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>Lent</td>
<td>Spring Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>Easter</td>
<td>Summer term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalen</td>
<td>Magdalene</td>
<td>Both pronounced ‘Maudlin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bod(leian library)</td>
<td>The ‘UL’ (university library)</td>
<td>The major university libraries (‘Copyright Libraries’ to which a copy of every single book published in the UK must be sent.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation</td>
<td>Vacation</td>
<td>Holiday. Long Vac = 16 week summer hol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tripos (C): originally meant a three-legged (as in ‘tripod’) stool on which students sat when taking their exams, the name now refers to the whole degree course, which is usually in 2 parts, with exams at the end of each!

Gonville and Caius College (C): usually referred to as Caius (pronounced ‘Keys’)  
St Edward’s Hall (O): always known as ‘Teddy Hall’

Director of Studies (DOS) (C): the person responsible for organising the teaching of a particular subject at a Cambridge College.

Bumps/torpids/blades/eights etc. various rowing terms

### What’s in a name?

St John’s: at Oxford = John the Baptist; at Cambridge = John the Evangelist  
Queens: at Oxford, Queen’s; at Cambridge, Queens’  
Other colleges which share the same name do honour the same person, even  
Magdalen(e) (Oxford without, Cambridge with). Both universities pronounce as ‘Maud-lin’, but allege that the other university pronounces as ‘Mag-da-len’!!  
St Cath?rine: at Oxford with an ‘E’; at Cambridge with an ‘A’. I think they honour the same saint, she of the Catherine-wheel.

Murray Edwards = New Hall (New Hall being apparently always intended as a temporary name, now officially changed (2008) after large donations from Murray and Edwards.

Some Oxford Colleges which have geographical town/city names (Exeter, Lincoln, were founded by Bishops from those bishoprics). Worcester and Hertford were founded by people from those places. Mansfield College was founded in Birmingham.
The Cambridge College which seem to have geographical names based on villages (Girton, Homerton, Newnham) are named after the local Cambridgeshire village.

College/Hall: There is no difference between a ‘College’ and a ‘Hall’, but Trinity College and Trinity Hall are entirely separate colleges at Cambridge. Christ Church (O) and Peterhouse (C) are, strictly speaking ‘Houses’, so ‘Peterhouse College’ is a solecism.

New College (O): Founded 1379 in honour of the Virgin Mary and therefore newer than the other Oxford college founded in her honour in 1326, now known (from its windows) as Oriel.

Permanent Private Halls (O): These are NOT the same as ‘normal’ Oxford Colleges, being much smaller, specialising in theology and related subjects and maintaining very close links to the particular religious order which founded them. For example, Blackfriars is essentially for Dominican monks.

Formal or informal hall is the term usually used to describe dinner in college. Informal usually means self-service. Formal usually means a set 3-course meal, with gowns worn over normal clothes, preceded by Latin grace and sometimes candlelit. Some colleges regard formal hall as elitist/archaic and do not hold it regularly or at all. Others hold it every evening.

Tutors, Dons, Fellows – all used to describe the academic staff (male and female) at both O&C colleges. For some reason senior academic staff at Christ Church are known properly as ‘Students’!

The ‘Backs’: the (very beautiful, picture-postcard) grounds of the historic colleges on the west side of Cambridge which back onto the river Cam (see front cover of this booklet!).

St Bene’t’s. Only somewhere in Cambridge could have a place name requiring two apostrophes! (The first one shows that St Benett originally had two Ts.) This church in central Cambridge is the oldest building in the county.

MGLC, Trinity Term, 2007 & Hilary Term 2011.