

University of Oxford

Answered by Lizzie – Access and Outreach Coordinator and former student at St Edmund Hall, Oxford.

1. What maths courses are available? What grades are required to access these courses? What is the interview process for maths-based courses?

Oxford offers [Maths](#) (A*A*A grades required, with the A*s in Maths and Further Maths A-Level (if Further Maths was taken); Maths and Computer Science (A*AA required, with an A* in Maths A-Level); Maths and Philosophy (A*A*A required, with A*s in Maths and Further Maths A-Level (if Further Maths was taken); and Maths and Statistics (A*A*A required, with A*s in Maths and Further Maths A-Level (if Further Maths was taken).

The interview process for the above Maths courses and other mathematically based science courses have similarities and differences. For these Maths courses an interview will largely revolve around a set mathematical problem or problems, which the interviewing Tutors will guide you through. The problem will be based in A-Level material, but will include challenging efforts that are designed to stretch and challenge you. You can see two sample Maths interview questions and a discussion of how you could work through them [here](#). In maths-based courses the problems may also have a mathematical dimension to them, but will be subject specific (e.g. a Chemistry interview question would be different to one asked in a Physics interview).

2. What percentage of your students attended a state school?

69% of students who started at Oxford in 2020 came from state schools. In 2019 the figure was 62.3% of UK students, which was actually about the same as the percentages of students from state schools being admitted to Exeter, Durham, Cambridge, and Bristol Universities. This figure has been consistently rising year on year.

3. Do you have a swimming pool?

Yes we do, it is a high tech filtered pool and located at the University's [Iffley Road Sports Centre](#).

4. How many international students do you have?

In 2019 21.2% of undergraduate students came from outside of the UK. 7.1% of students were from EU countries and 14.1% were from countries outside the EU. There are many student run societies for students from different continents and countries, and with such a large and diverse student population you are unlikely to be the only student from your country or of your nationality at Oxford.

5. How many students are in dorms/halls?

At Oxford students live in [Colleges](#) – which are like mini University campuses with their own facilities, including bedrooms. These bedrooms are all single occupancy – you won't have to share with anyone. In many Colleges all undergraduate students will live in College bedrooms for their whole course, and in some other Colleges students will live out in a privately rented house for a year (or longer if they want to).

6. What are the best GCSE and A Level options for me to pick?

It very much depends on the course you want to take. I would recommend looking at course pages on University websites or in their prospectuses to see which GCSEs and A-Levels are recommended

or essential. As a general rule, top Universities like Oxford most highly value traditional academic subjects (like Sciences, English, Maths, Geography, History, Languages or Music etc.) over some newer courses (such as photography).

7. What are your most popular courses?

The ten courses receiving the most applications in 2019 were: Philosophy, Politics and Economics; Medicine; Maths; Law; Economics and Management; Physics; History; English Language and Literature; Engineering Science; and Biochemistry.

8. What courses do you offer?

The full list of courses available at Oxford can be [found here](#).

9. Students would like to know if you have courses in the following subject areas:

Drama – no, but we do have numerous drama societies and many actors and performers have studied at Oxford.

Engineering – yes.

Musical theatre – no, but we do have a musical theatre society.

Coding/Website Design – no, but we do have a Computer Science course.

Computing – yes, Computer Science.

Gaming Design – no, but we do offer Fine Art and Computer Science courses.

Art/Design – yes, Fine Art.

Design/Technology – no, but we do have Engineering Science and Fine Art courses.

Teaching – not as a first degree, but once you have done an undergraduate degree you can study for a PGCE [here](#)

Film Making and Production – no.

Pharmacology/ Pharmaceuticals – no, but we do have a prestigious pharmacology department where students on Medicine, Biomedical Sciences, and Biochemistry courses can study and do research.

Astrophysics – our Physics course has astrophysics modules.

Veterinary –no.

Astrology – Astrology is not an academic subject, but if you meant Astronomy, that can be studied as part of our Physics course.

Geography – yes.

Architecture – no.

Nursing – no.

Medicine – yes.

Business – no, but we do offer Economics and Management.

Chemistry - yes.

10. Is an AS grade a useful qualification?

It depends, doing an AS level in a subject related to the one you'd like to apply for is a good way of showing the enthusiasm for learning and for your subject area that we love to see. If you are studying 3 A-Levels, you do not need to study another AS level to get an offer from Oxford.

11. What grades on average do I need to get accepted?

At Oxford we ask for AAA for most arts and humanities subjects, and A*AA for most of our science subjects, though some ask for A*A*A. You can check entry requirements on each course page, as [listed here](#).

12. What are your facilities like?

Very good! The central library at Oxford ([The Bodleian](#)) has over 13 million books in it, as well as over million maps and charts. The Bodleian is just one of 127 libraries at Oxford University, so we will have the books you need! If, somehow, we don't, we will buy the books you need and add them to our collection immediately. Outside of the libraries we have world leading laboratories where all sorts of science is done, from luminescence dating in Geography, to COVID vaccine research, and underground quantum atomic labs in Physics. There are numerous theatres and concert halls, art studios, dance studios, gyms, common rooms, sports pitches, and boat houses for rowing across the University.

13. In general, what grades are required for Engineering courses at uni?

On Oxford's [Engineering Science](#) course we ask for A*A*A with A* grades in Maths and Physics or Further Maths. Entry requirements at other Universities will vary.

14. Which courses take up the most time? Which are the most demanding?

How demanding you find a course, and how much time you need to spend on your work, depends on your strengths, weaknesses, and enjoyment of it. On average, science courses have more contact hours (time spent in lectures, seminars, tutorials, or labs) than arts and humanities courses.

15. Is accommodation always available? What is the average cost?

Oxford Colleges all guarantee accommodation for all first year students, and almost always for their third and fourth years (if they have one) too. Many also offer accommodation to their second year students, meaning that many students live in College accommodation for the whole of their degree, which is very unusual, and different to most universities. The cost varies, but because you only pay for your room during term time (so not over the holidays) costs are kept low. Typically you would probably pay £3,900 to £4,500 per year for a college room on a standard contract, which is significantly cheaper than many other Universities.

16. What proportion of graduates get into employment (linked to their degree) with 6 months of graduating?

Over 91% of Oxford students are in employment or further study 6 months after graduating. Because of the way this information is collected and published, it isn't possible to say what proportion of graduates are employed in jobs related to their degree. Of graduates in work (and not also studying) 25% were earning £35,500 or more within 6 months of graduating, and a further 50% were earning £27,000 or more. The prestige of Oxford, the way we teach, and the skills our

graduates are equipped with many employers, including in highly competitive industries such as finance, journalism, consultancy and media, actively recruit students from Oxford. We also have a great careers service you can use at any point in your life.

17. Do you think it's going to be easier to get in to universities, if less people want to go because of the pandemic?

If fewer people apply it may be easier to get in to some courses at some Universities, however I don't believe that there has been a decrease in the number of applications this year.

18. Are universities lowering offers because of the pandemic?

I understand that Birmingham University have lowered their entry requirements by one grade, though I'm not sure how many other Universities will lower their entry requirements too. Oxford are not planning to reduce our entry requirements, however we were one of the first Universities to accept students who had received an offer but been awarded lower grades based on the algorithm which unfairly penalised some students.

19. Would I be able to maintain my gaming life outside of university, as I'm part of a successful E-sports Fortnite team?

Oxford is quite a demanding University, however it is certainly possible to manage your time so that you can complete your work and keep up with commitments and hobbies such as this. I played cricket during my time as a student, and even playing such a time consuming sport I was able to get my work done and have plenty of socialising time too.

20. What %/hours is lectures/independent work on average? How many hours do you spend studying on average?

The balance between hours spent being actively taught (contact hours) and independent study time varies by subject and the year of your degree. As a general rule, arts and humanities degrees will have fewer contact hours than sciences. At Oxford students are usually recommended to spend about 35-40 hours a week studying, the same as having a 9-5 job on week days. Again this can vary by subject, year, and how you choose to study.

21. If someone had a criminal record, would it affect their chances of completing a degree?

Universities generally do not require the disclosure of any previous criminal convictions unless it would be relevant for the course – e.g. if it involves contact with vulnerable people, like a placement on a healthcare or teaching course. Prospective students subject to licence or probation conditions such as curfews or restricted use of computers would probably need to discuss this with their university to ensure they were still able to complete the required assessments.

22. What is your student satisfaction rate?

Oxford does not have a published student satisfaction score as a higher score could be used as justification to raise tuition fees, and the students have agreed to boycott the satisfaction survey to help prevent this. The last year not boycotted was 2016, when satisfaction was 90%, vs the national average of 81%. An alternative measure of how much students enjoy their time at Oxford and how well they are supported is the drop out rate (the number of students who leave before completing their degree), which at Oxford is just 1.3%, compared to the national average of 7.4%.

23. What GCSE grades do I need to be accepted into University?

This depends on the University and course applied for. As a general rule a grade 4 or above in English and Maths will make you eligible for most courses. At Oxford we do not have any set GCSE entry requirements, but would usually be looking for a mix of 7s and above at GCSE. We view your GCSE grades in the context in which they were achieved by looking at results in your school, schools like yours, and whether you have been in care or are a care leaver (if this has been declared on your UCAS application form). This means that if most people at your school get 4s and 5s but you have some 6s, 7s, or even an 8 or 9 we will be impressed because you have performed better than most others at your school.

24. Do Universities automatically think better of a student that studied in a private school rather than a state school?

No not at all. We are looking for academic ability and potential and enthusiasm for your course, not what kind of school you have been to.

25. What makes your university different from others?

Oxford University stands out for several reasons: we are consistently ranked as one of top 5 Universities in the world by the various different rankings that are produced each year. We are often ranked number one – we have been by The Times newspaper for the last six years in a row. Oxford consistently achieves such high rankings for several reasons. We have fantastic tutors delivering gold standard teaching and working on world leading research, which students benefit from in our unique small group teaching style. Only at Oxford and Cambridge can you expect to have small group (typically four students or fewer, often just one or two) at least once a week, no other Universities are able to match this. That means you get lots of attention and opportunities to discuss your work and academic interests. Some other universities offer tutorials (the small group teaching with lots of focus on each student from the tutor), but only at Oxford and Cambridge would you get a tutorial approximately once a week, if not more frequently, to complement teaching in lectures, seminars, and labs.

Because of the prestigious research conducted at Oxford, we have excellent facilities in arts, humanities, and sciences. These facilities include the 13 million books we have in the Bodleian Library, the 126 other libraries across the University, and many state-of-the-art laboratories with high tech equipment ranging from cellular imaging devices, to nano-fabrication, and vaccine development.

Thirdly, Oxford has a College system, which only a handful of other Universities can also offer. Each student belongs to one of nearly 40 colleges, which is where they live, eat, study, socialise, and can join in with activities like music, sports, and drama. Teaching and University level societies are also available, uniquely giving students two layers of opportunity to get involved with activities. Students study the same degree courses and sit the same exams regardless of which college they attend.

To find out more about what makes Oxford unique, take a look at [these facts](#).

26. Is there any way you can make your application more appealing to have a higher chance of getting accepted?

Fundamentally, Oxford, and most other top UK Universities, are looking for academic ability and potential, as well as a passion for the subject you are applying for. That means grades or predicted grades in line with their requirements (which you can find on the page for each course) and being able to show your enjoyment of and dedication to your course. That is done in your personal statement where you have 4000 characters (about 1 page of A4), to outline how and why you chose

to do that course. For example, you could talk about any interesting books you've read related to your subject, podcasts you've listened to, videos or talks you've watched. For more advice and ideas you can check out our [Personal Statement](#) video. You don't need to worry too much about standing out; so long as you fulfil the criteria and show your potential and enthusiasm, you'll have a good chance of getting an offer.

27. Is having top grades and no work experience better or worse than having mediocre grades and lots of work experience?

The majority of offers for university courses are based only on your grades, so the higher your grades the more courses you are likely to be accepted on to. Having work experience could be a good way of showing your interest in and commitment to studying your course, as long as it is related to the course, however it is rarely a formal entry requirement. If you would like to study medicine or veterinary science it may well be helpful to have some relevant work experience (e.g. have volunteered in a care home or helped with lambing time). There are some courses where you can be accepted based upon employment experience equivalent to A-Levels, my understanding is that this would mean several years of work in a relevant area.

28. How far away is your university from my school?

Oxford is 2 hours 20 minutes by car, or 4 hour 14 minutes by train, travelling via Birmingham or London, from Netherthorpe.

29. Do you think it is beneficial to get a job whilst you are at university? Does it affect your student loan if you have a part time job?

If you can find a part-time job relevant to your future career aspirations whilst at University that experience may well be beneficial. However, many employers, in particular those in competitive or highly paying fields, are looking for a 2:1 or better degree grade, and so any work experience should not prevent you from doing well in your degree studies. If you do not need to get a job during term time, or are willing to work during the holidays instead, then you will have more time for your academic work and socialising or hobbies. At Oxford students are generally discouraged from having jobs during term time, but working in the holidays is absolutely fine, and there are often opportunities to work in your College too, including during Open Days and Interviews.

How much student loan (maintenance loan) you can access is partly dependent on your household income. This means:

- your parents' income, if you're under 25 and live with them or depend on them financially
- the combined income of one of your parents and their partner, if you're under 25 and live with them or depend on them financially
- your partner's income, if you're over 25 and live with them (even if they spend most of their time abroad)
- income you get from your own savings, investments or property, for example dividends or rent

If you've supported yourself financially for at least 3 years or had no contact with your parents for over a year, you might be able to [apply as an 'independent student'](#).

As you can see, your own income from a job is not included, unless you are an independent student, so you will not lose loan money if you have a job at any time during your studies.

In addition, students might like to watch our [Student Q&A videos](#), our [Applying to Oxford](#) video series, or our [Virtual Tour](#) and take a look at our [Prospectuses](#). We also have a student run Instagram account, [@sehaccess](#).