

# **HELSEBY HIGH SCHOOL**

## **Oxbridge Applications**

<b>Lower Sixth</b>			
Spring/ Summer Term	Identification of potential applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils should express their interest to EV/BB</li> <li>• Pupils should start thinking about and writing their Personal statements</li> </ul>	See page 3
	Primary Meeting with Oxbridge Co-ordinator BB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to clarify if Oxbridge is right for applicant</li> </ul>	See page 3
	Preliminary college choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notify EV of your initial choice – this may change</li> </ul>	
Summer Holidays	Subject research/experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils must embark on serious background reading</li> <li>• And/or gain invaluable industry/subject experience in the workplace</li> </ul>	See page 9
	Oxbridge Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cambridge or Oxford?</li> <li>• Which college?</li> <li>• Which course?</li> </ul>	See page 3-8
	Personal Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise personal statement <b>prior</b> to returning to school</li> </ul>	See page 9
<b>Upper Sixth</b>			
<b>Deadline for Oxbridge Applications:</b>	General Application <b>October 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UCAS form</li> </ul>	See page 9
Autumn Term	Application procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants for October 15<sup>th</sup>, must ensure that their forms/personal statements are completed to a high standard <b>in plenty of time</b></li> </ul>	See page 9
	Secondary Meeting with Oxbridge Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This meeting will outline the interview process, and lead into the mock interviews</li> </ul>	
	Mock Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All candidates should have at least one general interview and one subject-specific interview</li> </ul>	See page 10
	Oxbridge Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If called, Interviews are ordinarily held in the first few weeks of December</li> </ul>	See page 10
	Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notification over the Christmas/New Year period</li> </ul>	See page 11
Spring Term	Pool interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates may be called for second round interviews – held in January</li> </ul>	See page 11

## Oxbridge Applications

## General Information

### Are you right for Oxford or Cambridge?

### And is Oxford or Cambridge right for you?

Despite the inherent gains of a degree from Oxbridge, you must think very seriously about making an application to these Universities. 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 by Helsby 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 (and AS) grades behind you at A\* and A?  
(The average successful candidate achieves 74% A\* grades from the total number of GCSE exams they sit)
- Are you going to perform sufficiently well in your A2 (A\*AA at A2) with over 90% in all modules?
- What do your subject teachers and tutor 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 commit to that amount of work?

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.

If not, then remember that there are many universities out there with similarly highly respected reputations and degrees – and in some cases they are ranked better than the Oxbridge degrees.

Go to the websites of each university. There is a great deal of information about each there and you need to read it carefully so that you understand the application process, have researched the courses and know what to expect if you are called for interview.

Oxford University will consider 5 pieces of data for each applicant:

- Whether the candidate's school GCSE and A2 scores are below the national average.
- The candidate's GCSE and AS results and predicted A2 grades.
- The candidate's score in the Admissions' Tests (Successful candidates need 3 'A's at A2 and to come within the top 80% in the Admissions' Tests) and the quality of submitted work.
- The candidate's postcode.
- Participation in Sutton Trust or Young Ambassador's Summer Schools.

## **Oxbridge Applications**

## **Why Oxbridge?**

If you do decide to apply to Oxbridge then the advantages of this system are vast. The two universities have a long history of superb education and intellectual regard. The subjects will be presented in a challenging and difficult manner and you will be pushed to your limits to explore your chosen subject in depth and breadth. The academic system at both institutions is centred on the Tutorial (Oxford) and Supervision (Cambridge) system. These are small groups, or one on one sessions with eminent fellows in the field where topics from lecture courses are investigated in more detail. There is no place to hide in these situations but the reward for being able to talk to the best and have them comment on your work is an incredibly stimulating one. These hour sessions give you the opportunity to really delve into a subject and take it in directions not possible in large group or lecture situations. The strength of Oxbridge teaching has relied on this system for centuries.

The terms are short and intense. You will be shocked by the amount of work that you are required to do, but also by the number of other activities open to you. Oxbridge has a collegiate system, where you apply to and belong to a college in the University. This will be your home and your immediate social circle. Tutorial teaching is organised through the Director of Studies for your subject in your college, whilst lectures are organised by the University departments. Each college is like a mini-university with a canteen, bar, sports fields, chapel, music/drama facilities, etc, although all colleges vary in age, size and particular provision. You can, therefore, represent your college in a sport, and if particularly talented, you may go on to represent the university. (This is true of most activities).

The Colleges provide a simple link from school to university as they are roughly similar in size – but you must choose your college carefully. It is important to remember that it is usually the college that you apply to and not the university. A careful and well-researched choice of college is imperative.

## Oxbridge Applications

## 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 feel whether you would be comfortable there.

### **Which course?**

Your choice of course is not necessarily as straight forward 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.

### **Does the course suit your needs/wants at 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.

You can find information on all of the courses in the prospectuses and online at

Cambridge – <http://www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/courses/html>

Oxford – [http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate\\_courses/courses/index.html](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/courses/index.html)

## Oxbridge Applications

## 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. New Hall College, Cambridge, is a women's college. Some colleges do not teach every subject.

The most important considerations are:

- Does the college provide your subject of choice?
- How many students do they ordinarily take per year, and how many applications do they expect? (Ratio of 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.
- Girls – do not dismiss the all-female college out of hand. As a general rule it receives fewer applications per place – and there are advantages to being in a single sex college.

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 there will be students around who are always a useful source of information.

### Open applications

If you are unable to decide upon a college there is no disadvantage to an Open Application. The university assigns you a college for initial interview 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. Most places are awarded to students who make an Open application, or who are 'pooled' to another college.

### Caution!

Do not just apply for the college that looks good, or is the richest or most famous. **You may well 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 and seek advice.

## Oxbridge Applications

## Your Application

### College Choice

Your choice of college must be confirmed with Miss Valentine. An initial indication prior to the summer holidays of Lower Sixth is required.

Although this is, in principle, your choice, it would be inadvisable for Helsby to allow too many applicants to apply to one college, (as this will reduce your chances of getting in). Similarly we may be able to advise you against a particular college if it is an unwise choice. Please take any advice that you are given, as this may make the difference between getting in and not.

### Application forms

There are additional application forms for the Cambridge Graduate Course in Medicine, music awards applicants and the Cambridge Special Access Scheme. These can be downloaded from the Cambridge website.

Cambridge Special Access Scheme (CSAS). This scheme is intended to help those:

- Where no one from your family has gone on to a degree
- Whose schooling has been disadvantaged?

CSAS asks school to provide additional information and a much fuller reference than usual.

When your college choice has been finalised with the school, you will be able to complete your actual application form. Please do so in ample time before the application deadline (**October 15<sup>th</sup>**) Miss Valentine will be required to provide a reference for you and all these processes take time. Do not be disorganised and miss the deadlines.

### Personal Statements

One of the most important parts of your UCAS form is your personal statement. This is your chance to explain what you want to do at University and any 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 must start thinking about and drafting your personal statement in the summer term of the Lower Sixth. Your tutor can advise you on what to write and how to write it, and if you start in ample time you will be able to get advice on how to improve it. If you leave it too late you will end up submitting a poorly written personal statement that will weaken your application. Your personal statement must focus on your academic progress: 2/3 academic, to 1/3 personal skills. Mrs Brockbank and Miss Valentine will be available for advice.

### Background reading/work experience?

You will be competing for a place at Oxbridge with up to 10 other top quality candidates. Academically they will be as good if not better than you. You therefore have to prove that you want to do the subject, that you are interested in it, and that you will succeed when there.

A simple way of doing this is to show that your interest goes beyond 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 you have dedicated their lives to their subject. They want you to be as engaged by the field as they are. You must be able to demonstrate a broad reading knowledge of your chosen subject.

You must, therefore, do some extra work over the summer. Good preparation is imperative, and any work you do at this stage will prove your devotion to the subject and give you something to talk about in the interview. **Do not underestimate the value of this effort.** If you are not prepared to put in the effort then you shouldn't be applying. Oxbridge want only the very best academic students.

## **Entry Tests**

A number of subjects require completion of Assessment Tests. About 70% of those applying to Oxford will be expected to undertake an admissions test in advance of short listing candidates for interviews. Please check the individual prospectuses for dates. This is important

Details can be obtained from: [www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/apply](http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/apply)  
[www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduatetests/tests/index.html](http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduatetests/tests/index.html)

## **Oxbridge Applications**

## **The Interviews**

Nearly everyone who applies to Oxford or Cambridge is called for interview in the first few weeks of December.

You should make sure that you are available for these interviews. They sometimes do run into our Christmas holidays. At Oxford you may be asked to attend interviews at another college, following those at your college of first choice, and so you may have to stay in Oxford for a few days.

Each of the colleges will conduct the interviews in their own way and so there are no set rules on what to expect. However, you should be prepared for at least two interviews at a college although medical students receive four, two at two colleges. Ordinarily this will include a subject based interview and a more general interview. Sometimes you may receive a second subject interview in place, of or as well as, the general interview. Most interviews are 20-30 minutes long.

### **Subject interviews**

These will be with a Fellow/Director of Studies from the college. They will want to find out what you know and how you are able to apply that knowledge more broadly. They will try to find out your strengths and weaknesses, and your interest in the subject. It is usual for them to ask you something that you may not know in order to see how you think around a problem.

The subject interview is when you need to show that extra bit of work or experience that you have done. If it is in your personal statement it, may well give you a talking point for the interview.

### **General interviews**

The general interview may be with the Admissions Tutor for the college, or a fellow from another subject. They will be looking to see what you are like, whether you are suited to the college and will be able to contribute positively to college life. Again, experiences of general interviews vary enormously, and whilst you cannot know what to expect it is advisable to be up to date on current affairs and have some interesting talking points in your personal statement.

### **Mock interviews**

In order to 'prepare' for the interviews, you should have at least one subject specific interview and one general interview at school during November/December. If these are not already arranged by the department you should ask a member of staff to conduct an interview with you. Although they cannot obviously predict what is going to be asked, it is good practice and experience to see how you cope under pressure and particularly how you cope with difficult/challenging questions. Each interviewer will write a report on your interview and will provide you and your tutor with some advice on how you might improve, and what your particular strengths are.

You **must** make sure that you have mock interviews. The experience is invaluable. As a school, we have a link with The Grange School, Hartford. You can have a mock interview with a specialist in your subject in September-November 2011.

## **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 also be confirmed by UCAS. 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 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.

Wherever you choose to apply, be it Oxbridge or elsewhere, good luck and make sure that you are organised and ahead of the game.

## Oxbridge Questions – subject and general

### Anglo Saxon Norse and Celtic

- What is the difference between history and literature?
- What first interested you in ASNAC?
- What would you note as the key differences between the Angles, Saxons, Norsemen and Celts?
- How did the Anglo Saxons bury their dead?
- How can you date a source if you don't know when or by whom it was written?
- Which papers in the ASNAC course are you most looking forward to?

### Biochemistry

- What are the differences between a human enzyme and the enzymes of organisms that live in a hot spring?
- How does DNA fingerprinting work? What is its use?
- How do amino acids behave in both acidic and basic conditions?
- Why do you wish to read biochemistry rather than Chemistry?
- Current issues in biochemistry

### Chemistry

- What makes drugs physiologically active?
- Write down an organic reaction
- How would you calculate the inter-atomic spacing of particles in this room?

### Classics

- Do you think that Tacitus was biased in his writings and if so, does that render them useless?
- Are history and myth compatible?
- What underlying message are there in the Aeneid suggesting that Rome and its foundations were not very secure?
- Why do you think Ancient History is important?
- How civilised was the Roman world?
- Apart from your A level/IB texts what have you read in the original or in translation?

### Earth Sciences

- What do you believe would be the major differences on earth if:
  - a) No atmosphere had ever formed?
  - b) There was no water?
  - c) Plate tectonics did not exist?
- What would you expect to see at a compressional/extensional/passive margin?
- List a number of possible methods for dating a rock specimen
- When do you think oil will run out?

### Economics and Management

- Consider a production line. What could be done to help the worker to get away from the routine?
- Discuss the interaction between fiscal and monetary policy
- Why do Rolls Royce build cars by hand and Toyota by machine?
- Should governments subsidise agriculture?
- Relate Keynes' work to the dot-com boom
- What's the difference between a correlation and a cause and effect relationship?
- How effective is current monetary policy?
- What are the advantages for Britain of staying out of the Euro?

## Engineering

- If you had a cylinder, sealed at both ends, with the pressure rising inside, would it blow at the end or split along the side first?
- At what altitude  $h$  above the North Pole is the weight of an object reduced to one half of its value on  $a$  the Earth's surface? Assume the earth to be a sphere radius  $R$  and express  $h$  as a fraction of  $R$
- How does an aeroplane take off?
- What is the greatest engineering feat of all time?

## English

- Define irony
- What is the difference between a simile and comparison?
- Read a given poem. Can you date it? Comment on the imagery used and its effect; does it remind you of anything else that you've read?
- What is your favourite novel of all time? (now tell me why you didn't like it)
- What is tragedy?
- What use is the study of English?
- What is the most important work of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?
- Do you keep a diary? Why?
- What was the last play that you saw at the theatre?

## Geography

- What are the advantages for retailers to concentrate their activities in malls rather than disperse through towns?
- Do you have an interest in saving the environment? What evidence is there for human influences on climate
- If you could take a non-geographer anywhere in the world to convince them geography was important, where would you take them and what would you say?
- Why is climate so unpredictable?
- Should erosion be halted?

## History

- Would history be worth studying if it didn't repeat itself?
- How do today's interpretations of democratic values differ from those of 19<sup>th</sup> Century and how have they evolved?
- How does an historian gather information?
- What use is counterfactualism to an historian?
- Does the past exist?
- Define revolution
- What is the difference between Modern History and Modern Politics?
- Is history about individuals or nations?
- Why do Historians differ in their views on Hitler?
- What makes a good historian?

## History of Art

- What is your opinion of the Turner Prize and Brit art?
- Discuss restoration and conservation. Are they a worthwhile investment?
- What work of art would you most like to own?
- Is History of Art more loosely allied to history or to art?
- Which is your favourite period and why?
- What do we look for when we study art?
- Compare and contrast these (3) images
- What exhibitions have you been to recently?

## History and Politics

- Is national character a useful concept in history?
- How can one define a revolution?
- How would you differentiate between power and authority?
- Do governments ever do any good?
- Is terrorism necessarily a bad thing? (present a case for and against)

## Land Economy

- Why are wages higher in London?
- What do you think are the implications for shopping with the phenomenon of the internet?
- If someone is acquitted in Criminal proceedings, can they, and should they still be liable to be sued in Civil Law?
- What is it about Land Economy that grabs your attention?
- Will the IT revolution eventually result in the death of inner cities?

## Law

- If A gave B £100 thinking it was a loan, but B thought that it was a gift, should he have to give it back?
- Smith sees Jones walking towards the edge of a cliff. Smith knows Jones is blind, but doesn't like him, so allows him to walk off the edge. Is this murder?
- Should judges have a legislative role?
- Can you define intellectual property?
- A cyclist rides the wrong way down a one way street and a chimney falls on him – what legal proceedings should he take?
- Should prisoners have the vote?

## Maths

- Prove that  $n^2 - 1$  is divisible by 8 for all odd integers  $n$
- A body with mass  $m$  is falling towards earth with speed  $v$ . it has a drag force equal to  $kv$ . Set up a differential equation and solve it for  $v$ .
- Prove that any number consists of prime factors or is a prime number
- Who is your favourite mathematician?
- What would happen to a pencil on a table in a train that brakes suddenly?

## Medicine

- What interests you most in current medical advances?
- Why is it that cancer cells are more susceptible to destruction by radiation than normal cells?
- What is the normal level of potassium? What is it used for? How does it move in and out of cells?
- Why do you want to be a doctor?
- What role does ethics play in medicine?
- What will you do if, after a year of studying medicine you decide it's not for you?
- Outline respiration
- What problems exist in the NHS?
- What do you do to relax?
- How would you measure the weight of your own head?
- What is diabetes?

## **Modern Languages**

- Why do you want to study a very literature based degree?
- Do you notice any differences between English and European literatures? If so why?
- Discuss current affairs relevant to the countries/languages to be studied
- What is your favourite book in the language?
- Is any one language better than another? (argue for and against)
- Is it important to have an understanding of the history of a country to learn its language?
- How important is biography in the study of literature?

## **Natural Sciences**

- How many molecules are there in this room?
- Discuss the ways in which plants adapt to dry conditions
- When an ice cube melts in a glass of water, does the water level increase, decrease or stay the same?
- Which reached the bottom of a slope faster, a ball rolling down the slope, or a ball sliding down the slope?
- Are parasites bad?

## **Physics**

- Explain how we know a centripetal force exists and how we can prove the presence of this force
- Why is it not strictly true to say that one planet orbits another?
- Why does metal expand when it is heated?
- How does glass transmit light?
- How does the voltage on a capacitor vary if the dielectric gas is ionised?

## **Physiology**

- What ways can you think of for a molecule to cross a cell membrane?
- What is the main function of the nervous system?

## **PPE**

- Can Science and religion ever be comfortable 'bedfellows'?
- What is Communism?
- What are the origins of wage inflation?
- How is the study of Politics enhanced by the study of Philosophy and Economics? (and any other way round)
- What has been Britain's greatest political achievement of recent years?
- Define government – why do we need a government?
- What is the difference between a society, a state and an economy?

## **Psychology**

- Discuss the origin of phobias (nature vs nurture)
- How useful are twin studies?
- What is love?
- If a child does a painting of a 'tiger among lilies' (their description) which looks nothing like the subject to you, despite the child having seen a tiger at the zoo the previous day, how can they be satisfied with the outcome?
- Can we think without language?
- What is crime, and is there such a thing as a criminal mind?
- What aspects of the course are of the greatest interest to you? ... Why do you think that is?
- What tricks do you use to remember things? – how does this work?

### **Social and Political Sciences**

- Define Sociology
- Why do we need to understand a person's culture?
- Does the welfare state trap people in poverty?
- Do you believe in selective education?
- Is prison a successful answer to crime?

### **Theology**

- Do the Gods command it because it is great, or is it great because the Gods command it?
- What are the moral implications, if any, on voluntary euthanasia?
- What would the world be like without any religion?
- What is the best reason for believing in God?
- Why are there two creation epics in Genesis?

### **Veterinary Science/Medicine**

- Is selective breeding tantamount to genetic engineering?
- Can you describe an experiment to differentiate between a normal and multi-resistant strain of bacteria?
- Discuss the mechanism underlying sensory adaptation.
- Shown a specimen and asked to describe it
- What is the case for testing on animals? What is the case against it?
- How are animals different from humans?

## Examples from candidates who applied in 2008.

### Oxford – Modern Languages

#### Questions that were asked:

- What is the importance of Literature in the modern day?
- To what extent is pathetic fallacy used in Collet's 'Le Blé en Herbe'?
- Can you class it as poetry?
- Why do you want to come to Magdalen / Oxford?
- What is the difference between Shakespeare and Harry Potter?
- Other social influence on works?

#### Advice to interviewees:

To seek help and preparation for interview outside school. To put yourself on an even playing field with other candidates. Also to do plenty of reading around your subject, e.g. Literature, current affairs.

### Cambridge – Natural Sciences

#### Questions that were asked:

- How is structure of protein important?
- Where would you expect hydrogen bonds to form?
- Where would ionic bonds be found in this history?
- Chemical x has a benzene ring. Explain why this chemical can be taken up by cells.
- What is an amyloid fibril?
- How do fish obtain oxygen from water?
- Draw a gill.
- Explain counter current – where is diffusion greatest?
- Why is it not beneficial to a fish to have more gill plates?
- Why don't whales get the bends?
- Explain how a synchrotron produces circular light.
- General chatter.

### General Interview Questions

The General interview is used to probe a student's interest in their studies, the university and extra-curricular activities. It is also used as a tool with which to test their thinking skills, and their broader considerations of the world around them – the questions can be quite random, but they allow the interviewer to assess how the student thinks/approaches problems. Do they give up because the question is too hard, or do they logically consider the various aspects of the question and come to a well measured conclusion?

- Is the moon made of cheese?
- What colour is time?
- Why do horses only have one toe?
- Is music a universal language?
- Is the past made up?
- A dodo no longer exists; therefore does the past exist once it's happened?
- Who is your hero?
- How would your friends describe you? (Which feature would you change?)
- If the desert is so hostile an environment, why do the Bedouin live there?
- $2+2=4$ . Under what conditions might this be incorrect?

- Great works of art and of literature are intrinsically worth the same, why does art sell for so much more?
- What is the point of learning?
- Is *Eastenders* a reliable portrayal of East London life?
- Can Science ever be right?
- Do you think Britain is too small to ever rule the world?
- Do you agree with the fact that politics is, and always should be, a male domain?
- When does a foetus become a child and therefore become worth saving?
- Is Religion the real root of all evil?
- Why is grass green? (*scientific answer? Or 'green' as a signifier?*)
- Which is better – quantity or quality?
- Logically if the glass is half full, the bottle must be half empty. Can one never therefore be a pure optimist? (*Literal assumptions of the liquid in the glass having originated in the bottle; size of the bottle – half to half?, and general theory of why a half full glass is optimistic*)
- Are borders enough to distinguish between countries?
- Put forward an argument in favour of capital punishment. (*will they?*)
- Is the British Monarch anything other than a figure head?
- How does the way you think determine who you are?
- What was the last novel of note that you read? (*- why was it 'of note'?*)

### **Current affairs**

Students will be questioned on current affairs. You should try to ask them something they *should* know, and perhaps something they *won't* know but should be able to comment on.

### **Mock Interviews**

Please see Miss Valentine or Mrs Brockbank to arrange a mock interview. These can be school-based, or at another school by a specialist in your subject. Feedback will be given from your mock interview.

### **General tactics**

Always follow up on something they have said

Keep them on track if they start to wander

Play devil's advocate

Try presenting them with inaccurate 'facts' – see how they react, will they correct you?

### **What to look for**

A good candidate will take the ideas presented and think carefully before answering. They will address all pertinent points and come to a conclusion. Even if they clearly know nothing on the topic, they will be able to relate it to something they do know and in doing so attempt to answer the question. They will not drift too far beyond the point. If a candidate does not know what the interviewer means, he / she will ask for clarification. This is a sign of a good learner, and someone the interviewer might prefer to teach.

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*Dr Emma Smith, an admissions tutor at Hertford College, said "All the questions interviewers ask are an attempt to get beyond what candidates may have prepared or studied in advance.*

*"We want them to pick up the ball and run with it.*

*"We don't want them to cram up with lots of knowledge. It's not Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? We want to know how they think."*

### **Bibliography**

Alakija, S (2001) Getting into Oxford and Cambridge. 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. London: Trotman

Stourton, I (2005) So you want to go to Oxbridge? Tell me about a banana... London: Oxbridge applications.

## **Oxbridge Interview Advice**

The most important thing to remember is that the interview is not designed to scare you, or make you look stupid. The interviewers will, potentially, be your teachers for the future so they want to see what you are capable of and not scare you into silence.

A few tips:

- **Listen to the question**

This may seem obvious, but when you are nervous it is sometimes difficult to focus. Relax and make sure that you are listening intently

- **Don't presume that you don't know the answer**

Often you will be asked a question to which you are not expected to know the answer. The interviewer may just be looking to see if you can apply what you DO know, to try and work out something that you DON'T know. (Obviously if you are asked for a factual answer to a straight question that you don't know the answer to, then it is better to admit it and get on to another question)

- **Ask if you are unsure**

The interview is like a mock tutorial. The interviewer *is* looking to see what you know, but also is investigating whether you can learn. If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification, or for it to be rephrased. Ask the interviewer to explain what they mean, or what they are looking for, in your answer.

If you do not understand a word that they have used, ask them to explain. This will serve your answer much better in the end.

- **Don't be afraid to argue**

The interviewer may play devil's advocate and see how well you can defend your answer. If you believe what you have said is right, then defend it.

However – if the interviewer presents you with information that contradicts/debunks your argument, make sure you include this is your *new* answer. Can you work with new information, and learn from what you are taught?

- **Be prepared to have to think on your feet**

Often you will be asked to suddenly come up with an answer to something about which you haven't previously thought.

- **Don't be afraid of silence**

If you need time to think about something then take time. Ensure that your answer is well formed rather than a string of random thoughts

- **Don't be afraid of 'thinking out loud'**

Especially when you don't know an answer, you might like to think out loud, so that the interviewer can at least see the issues that you are considering. This can say a lot about potential.

- **Ask questions of them**

Often at the end of an interview you will be asked if you have any questions. An engaged/enthusiastic student will normally want to know something.

If you are unsatisfied with an answer you have given, or if you want to go back to something at the end and ask them what they think, then do so.

DON'T ask a question if you really don't have anything worthwhile to ask

- **Prepare for those questions you can predict:**

- Be up to date on Current affairs
- Why do you want to study this subject?
- Why do you want to go to Oxford/Cambridge/this college?
- Questions derived from your Personal Statement (Ensure you have read this)

- **General Advice**

- Be on time
- Be smartly dressed
- Take an umbrella
- Shake hands and smile
- Eye contact is important.

Overall, relax and try to enjoy the experience. Remember that they are not out to trick you, but to see who you are and what you know.

Always be yourself, honest and open.

Good luck

## **University applications: how to ensure success**

### **Oxbridge additional Personal Statement / Reference**

#### **The Personal Statement**

##### **What to include:**

- Specific aspects of the course that appeal (content of the course/modules)
- The appeal of the Cambridge/Oxford course structure/collegiate system (though not necessarily the specific college)
- Identify wider interests
- Include more recent information

NB: Some of this information may well be picked on in the interview, and so it is a possible way of guiding the interview content. Similarly, it is important not to entrap oneself!

This need not fill the box – but the information should be relevant and important to your application.

#### **Example of Oxbridge Personal Statements**

The Medical course at Cambridge is ideally suited to my strengths, emphasising the theoretical and scientific basis of medicine in the undergraduate course. I would relish the opportunity to spend my third year studying Biochemistry in order to broaden my interest in medical research and to improve my Medical understanding in the long run.

The opportunity afforded by ASNAC to combine my passion for Medieval History with Literature and a Language is hugely exciting to me. This is something I have only previously been able to do outside formal learning through my interest in reading Welsh and Irish myth stories in the original texts. I am a keen and self motivated student, and I would enjoy working in an academic environment. The supervision system at Cambridge, would I believe, stretch me intellectually.

PPE at Oxford would, I am sure, allow me to concentrate all my efforts on my great academic passions. I am fascinated by the relationship between the three disciplines and would relish the opportunity to immerse myself in academic study. This has only been reaffirmed by my recent involvement in an international debating competition on the topic of Third World debt – clearly an issue with Political, Economic and Philosophical implications.