

Pathways to Professions: Oxbridge

Introduction

Getting into Oxford or Cambridge University is extremely challenging, places are highly competitive and each year these universities attract the best students in the country. At Dixons Sixth Form Academy we have a number of students with outstanding academic achievements at GCSE, our Oxbridge pathway is designed to help give those students all the support they can get in achieving places at the most prestigious universities in the UK. This programme is designed to promote interest in applying, encouragement to achieve excellence at A Level, and provide specific and tailored support to help students navigate the selection process. We believe strongly that every student achieving excellent results at GCSE should strongly consider these universities for future study, and that we aim to get a large number of successful applications to both.



Year 11 – before you start Dixons Sixth Form

The best preparation for an application for Oxbridge is to achieve highly at GCSE. We will work closely with Dixons Academies Trust at key events such as the Grade 9 Conference, to raise aspirations and achievement at GCSE. Oxford and Cambridge both take into account a broad range of factors when students apply, they look at predicted grades, personal statements, aptitude test scores, references and interviews. GCSE grades are one of the most important and reliable sources of information about academic potential that they have. Students with exemplary GCSE results have a much higher chance of gaining entry.

However, GCSE results alone are insufficient. Oxford and Cambridge are both looking for **genuine curiosity, academic passion and a strong work ethic**. It is a good idea to read widely around the subjects you are interested in, both at GCSE and A Level, with a particular focus on going beyond the requirements of your current courses.

Year 12 – programme

EPQ

The EPQ is a 5000-word researched project that also includes a formal presentation. Students exploring similar subjects are in the same group for their EPQ course. This not only means you are with a group of students with the same interests and applications, it also means that you will learn about all the specific topics that students in your group choose to do their EPQ on. The final presentations for students are held as an evening gala event (to which parents are invited) and this formal presentation further develops students' communication skills.

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Super curricular reading

Broader reading is essential for applications to Oxbridge. We will provide you with tailored, subject specific, super curricular reading lists. These will broaden your knowledge of your subject, enhance the depth of your understanding and provide key points to discuss in your UCAS personal statement and interview. We will also encourage you to follow your own interests, current affairs and keep up to date with new research in your chosen academic field. This approach also has significant benefits for your study at A Level, as this enhances and improves your understanding of courses studied.

Subject study groups

On top of broader reading, we will encourage students through the creation of small study and discussion groups for each subject. These will provide a forum to discuss their findings, to be pushed in group discussions about the essential thinking in their subjects, and generally experience the style of small group learning found at both universities in their tutorial / supervision models. These groups will evolve over the course of year 1 into interview preparation sessions at the start of year 2, helping to promote the confidence and ability of students to debate, discuss and argue with flair and precision.

University visits

Students will be taken on a visit to both universities in year 1 to experience the city, college based environment, meet with tutors and attend guest lectures. This is an essential part of the preparation for application, Oxford and Cambridge are universities with 1000 years of history, exemplary facilities and ancient traditions. This can be quite intimidating for many students, and so it is really important that some of the myths surrounding Oxbridge are challenged and demystified. These are wonderful places to study, but not for everyone, visiting is an essential part of the decision making process for every student. Students who are on the Oxbridge pathway, will be well prepared for entrance to any prestigious university, such as Durham or Edinburgh, so these skills are highly transferable. However, we hope to encourage many to apply, as the opportunities that arise from studying at Oxbridge are unrivalled, and we think Bradford students deserve those opportunities.

Summer schools

Both Oxford and Cambridge run a number of summer school opportunities, alongside other organisations such as the Sutton Trust. We will be advertising and publishing details of all of these opportunities for students and encouraging them to apply and attend. Summer schools are often run at low or no cost to students, and give them an opportunity to sample the lifestyle and environment of Oxford or Cambridge away from staff and parents. Equally, these summer schools are often focused on the application process and how to succeed in getting a place, as well as providing academic enrichment based on subject interest.

Oxbridge conference

All students will attend the regional conference for Oxbridge run by UCAS at Elland Road in Leeds. This is often the first overview of the opportunities, process and application challenges that Sixth Form students come across. The event provides excellent guidance on how to write personal statements and further insights into what is expected of students who apply.

Extra curricular activities

Academic excellence is essential for applications to Oxford and Cambridge, however, due to the competitive nature of applications, we expect all Oxbridge pathways students to be actively involved with the extracurricular life of the school. Oxbridge value excellence outside of the classroom, as it demonstrates that applicants are well-rounded individuals. We will encourage students to get involved in sport, music, drama, as well as demonstrating that they can serve the academy and wider communities. Membership of the student executive always looks good on Oxbridge applications.

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Year 13 – programme

Personal statement support

You will stay with the same Progress Director from year 1 to year 2 and that enables them to give you continuous feedback and support as you develop your personal statement over the summer holidays.

UCAS support

Students applying for these courses must submit their UCAS application by early-October which is earlier than the UCAS deadline for other courses. We deliver a bespoke UCAS service, focused on ensuring students are ready for this earlier deadline and that their application reflects the skills required for these courses. Our staff have significant experience ensuring that students put together the strongest possible applications.

Aptitude test support

Oxford and Cambridge run their own subject based aptitude tests, for example Oxford runs an exam called the History Aptitude Test (HAT) for history. Subject study groups will focus on providing exam guidance, past papers, mark schemes and a marked mock exam, before entry to the tests themselves which occur in late October / start of November. These are tests that are not examining A Level subject content, but seek to provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in new contexts, or grapple with completely unfamiliar concepts. These tests are challenging, but most students who undertake them find them an interesting and enjoyable insight into study at a higher level.

Interview preparation

The most distinctive feature of the Oxbridge application process is the formal interview. These occur at the end of December half term and involve the students travelling to the university, often staying for a few days, and experiencing the learning environment of the university first hand. This is a highly challenging experience, but nearly all students find it highly rewarding, as it is a chance to speak to world experts in their field of academic interest. Our programme will provide support, guidance, practice and mock interviews in the lead up to interview, to ensure that students are as prepared as can be.

Post Offer academic support

The final challenge for all Oxbridge candidates, is ensuring that they get the grades they need to meet their offers. Oxbridge usually give a grade combination to the effect of A*AA or A*A*A. We will do everything we can to ensure that you achieve the grades you need.