



Priority Applications

**Aiming for Success in Oxbridge,
Medicine, Dentistry & Veterinary courses**

It is never too early to think about applying to Oxbridge, or other priority areas which require early UCAS application, such as Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary courses. Each year a significant number of BWS pupils apply to Oxford and Cambridge universities, and for Med/Vet courses, and a pleasing number of them obtain places. Competition for places is fierce, and anything which you can do to differentiate yourself from the competition will help. If you are really passionate about studying a particular subject at Oxbridge, or Med/Vet courses, be sure to talk to the Mrs Armstrong and the Sixth Form Office, your Academic Mentor and your teachers about which books they would recommend, which podcasts you should be listening to, which courses or work experience you should be planning and how you might go about deepening your passion by researching a particular topic in greater depth. You should be reading widely and taking every opportunity given to you in class to extend your work beyond that required by the syllabus. Successful applicants have always shown a proactive approach to developing their love of learning in their chosen field.

Some subjects require applicants to take a special test; this may be a national test such as the BMAT or UKCAT for Medicine, or may be a paper set and marked by the university. Many humanities courses will also require you to send in examples of marked work. You should ensure that you familiarise yourself with all the details early so that you can plan your preparation accordingly.

Students interested in applying for priority courses will be asked to attend an interview with the Headmaster. Heads of department and academic staff will be asked to give the names of possible candidates and to confirm that those who have declared themselves interested are of the right calibre. The application process is a demanding one and BWS will advise that it is not in a student's best interest to apply if his or her GCSE and AS level scores are not sufficiently high. You will find some academic profiles of our successful candidates later on in the guide.

College and university open days are a great source of information and you will find details of these on the Oxford, Cambridge and Med School websites. It is considered essential for all serious applicants to have visited at least one open day. These are arranged by you as an individual.

BWS will also arrange visits to Oxford and Cambridge, and organise mock interviews, as well as arranging for speakers from Oxbridge to come and give presentations to you and your parents.

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Candidate Selection at Oxbridge

Oxford and Cambridge differ from most other universities in seeking a wider variety of information about the candidates applying to them. All universities consider the following information from your UCAS form:

- GCSE grades
- AS grades (and A levels if A2s already taken)
- You can also choose to give your AS module scores – for a “high-flier” applying to Oxbridge this would be normal.
- UCAS personal statement
- School reference

Oxford and Cambridge also consider:

- Submitted Work, with teacher marks
- Aptitude Test results where applicable (for most Oxford courses and from autumn 2016, most Cambridge courses will require tests too)
- Interview performance

And Cambridge requires you to fill in a Supplementary Questionnaire (the SAQ) which must include your specific AS (where taken) exam module scores.

Typically, Oxford and Cambridge both use a basket of different information sources to help them make their decisions – the weight accorded to each varies from college to college and course to course (and may vary from year to year as well). Each area needs to be good – for example, a candidate with no A*s at GCSE is extremely unlikely to receive an offer, while a short, rushed, irrelevant and badly written personal statement is also likely to result in no interview. Clearly it is desirable to be very strong in every single category but this isn't the case for every successful applicant. For example, a B grade at AS in a subject that has been dropped, and which is unrelated to the course being applied for is not terminal for an application, providing the candidate is strong in the other areas.

One misconception that students often have is that grades, UCAS statements, tests, etc. are only used to select who to call for interview, and that at interview the playing field is level and all have an equal chance of impressing the interviewers and getting an offer. This can be true of medical school interviews, for example, but at Oxford and Cambridge the final selection will still weigh all the information, with the interview only one (important) part of the picture. For example, a candidate at Cambridge with 98%+ scores in 4 AS levels and all A*s at GCSE is likely to get an offer even if their interview was only OK, whereas a more marginal candidate with a great interview might well still not get in.

Candidate Selection for Medicine and Dentistry

Institutions and courses vary considerably, but Medicine and Veterinary applicants are required to take either the BMAT or the UKCAT test, depending on what particular universities require. Medical and Veterinary courses almost always interview shortlisted candidates, but the format varies – many institutions now use a “multi-mini” format where candidates rotate between a number of stations, completing a different task at each one, rather than a traditional interview.

1. Personal Statement

a. The plan

Your personal statement is your chance to distinguish yourself from the other equally high achieving students applying for your course and so you should aim to write an interesting, engaging and persuasive piece of prose. Broadly, three-quarters plus of the statement should focus on the subject you wish to study, with the rest giving a broader perspective of your strengths as a potential student.

Remember that the same statement will be read by all five of the universities to which you are applying, so it isn't just being tailored for Oxford or Cambridge, or for one particular course. On the whole, however, a good personal statement for Oxbridge will be equally good for all your other choices. Only if the courses you are applying for are significantly different from institution to institution is this likely to present any problems – if this applies to you, see Mrs Armstrong, Mr Endersby or Mr Burnside early to discuss what approach to take.

It is important to realise that the personal statement is not only used to select students for interview (indeed, this shortlisting will be very largely done on grades); it is also (and at some colleges, mostly) used at the interview itself. Although occasionally students do have interviews in which nothing in their personal statement comes up, it is common for interviewers to start with questions about topics, books or experiences mentioned in the personal statement. These are supposed to be easy questions to put you at your ease! So don't put anything in the personal statement you wouldn't be prepared to talk about at interview.

Successful UCAS Personal Statements contain the following three elements:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| <u>Passion</u> | - | A genuine and wide-ranging seriousness about and enjoyment of your subject |
| <u>Action</u> | - | What you have done to pursue your subject and importantly some of your insights, particularly things done beyond your studies. |
| <u>You</u> | - | Extra-curricular activities and experiences which will make you the ideal student. |

b. What experiences you should have

'Action' – Your Curricular Experiences

The **'Action'** section of your Personal Statement will convince a tutor of the **'Passion'** you may claim to have. You should therefore ensure that you refer to a rich variety of experiences. Typical experiences are:

- Books/journals read
- Lectures attended (and enjoyed!), including podcasts
- Courses attended
- Work experience and shadowing
- Competitions entered/qualifications achieved
- Trips
- Membership of societies/clubs
- Relevant skills from other A-Levels (e.g. argument, analysis)

Merely listing pursuits may appear boastful and unconvincing; it is vital to reflect on and explain the importance of your experiences, what you learnt from them and how they have enhanced your knowledge and interest.

Too few experiences?

If you are lacking experiences as the UCAS deadline looms, you should firstly get reading – ask your teachers for book recommendations and power-read for a few days, noting down interesting points. For lectures and courses, great resources are our local universities. Many offer free evening lectures, so search the relevant departments and get yourself booked onto at least one; podcasts and online lectures can also be very stimulating. Do reflect on your time studying your subject, it is also likely you would have been on a trip at some point which may have triggered or enhanced your interest.

Too many experiences?

If you are in the fortunate position of having many experiences pursuing your chosen subject, you must be careful not to reel off a list, as impressive as it may be. Try to group experiences, so for example a trip and a lecture may have informed you of the historical development of the subject, whereas that book you've just finished may have given you a new insight into the development of cutting edge theories. Emphasis needs to be placed on important experiences so it may be necessary to miss out some of your less interesting experiences, or those that took place some years ago.

'You' – Your Extra Curricular Experiences

These experiences will help to prove that you are a resourceful, resilient, reliable and committed student (amongst other desirable characteristics). Again, you should avoid reeling off a list of every achievement since your first distinction in Year 7. Instead, *make clear how each experience has developed you*; all those duties involved in being a prefect demonstrate commitment, so too does membership of a band (although perhaps with a touch more creativity), captaining a team involves leadership and communication skills.

In terms of organising your extra curricular experiences, perhaps group them into 'skills that will make me a good student' and 'skills that will make me a good person to have about'. Suggestions of such transferable skills are below:

'Skills that will make me a good student':

- Being a 'self starter'
- Independent
- Questioning
- Hard working
- Committed
- Enthusiastic
- Responsible
- Resilient

'Skills that will make me a good person to have about':

- Musical
- Sporting
- Teamwork
- Organisation
- Management
- Leadership
- Communication
- Reliability

c. Personal Statement examples

The following excerpts are from Personal Statements of past BWS students who were successful in gaining a place at Oxbridge. They are organised under 'Passion', 'Action' and 'You' headings.

Passion - A genuine passion for and enjoyment of your subject

1. "Science fascinates me as it underpins all aspects of modern society; its study is crucial to the advancement of technology and the development of industry which is why I want eventually to have a career in research. Attempting to understand the fundamentals of physical science matter, energy and the ways in which they interact will be a challenging and rewarding way to continue my studies. I enjoy learning about the many different models and interpretations that we use to explain the chemical phenomena and building up a base of concepts which can then be used to make empirically verifiable predictions about a chemical system. I also find the processes involved in developing a new scientific theory fascinating so I am committed to studying pure science, preferably in an environment which places great emphasis on research. As chemistry has the broadest range of areas to study, it has the greatest potential of the physical sciences both for me as a future academic specialisation and for the whole world as a dynamic area of theoretical and practical discovery."
2. "Law is fundamental to a civilisation; it can be used to maintain equality or to enforce oppression. Thus I feel morally and intellectually compelled to attain a greater understanding of the law. However, upon preliminary reading (of such texts as Learning the Law by Glanville Williams and A Short Introduction to Law by Raymond Wacks) I have become increasingly interested in the law itself. I am excited by the uncertainty and ambiguity present in law, how one statute can be interpreted according to the variety of rules. This interpretive element complements my fascination with language. I am enthused by the application of logic to details, yet I also enjoy the abstraction commonly required. The exploration of moral issues at the heart of law also excites me. I believe law provides a diverse intellectual exercise, therefore I have decided to pursue it. The freedom a Law course offers is also appealing, it allows me to explore specific avenues which interest me."
3. "History has consistently been of great significance to me throughout my childhood and continues to intrigue me to this day. I have been nurtured in an environment where history, modern as well as antique, is admired and enjoyed through numerous visits to historical sites and discussions at home. As I progressed through school I found that in history lessons I could truly channel a passion and a hobby into an examined course, applying skills of analysis, argument and memory. I swiftly became fascinated by the art of finding links between civilisations and regimes, be they in close chronological proximity or extremely distant and also links between a sequence of events and their effects. This art of finding parallels within history and analysing cause and effect, that has in turn shaped history. The current UN for example, is a testament to knowledge gained from the failure of the League of Nations."
4. "I have always enjoyed battling the frustration of being immersed in a complex mathematics problem; and find the fulfilment of discovering a solution a moment of intense satisfaction. My desire to study this subject is founded in both simple pleasure and a deep interest in all areas of mathematics, resulting in the need to know much more than merely the necessary formulae. I am intrigued by how

results covered in the syllabus can be derived or proven, how they were discovered and how they can form part of another problem's solution; with each clarification leading on to more questions and further areas for exploration. In maths I have discovered a subject I both excel at and get great pleasure from studying."

5. "I want to study engineering because I relish the challenge of solving problems that will offer real practical solutions to people around me. The breadth of the course is excellent as it will allow me to experience a range of possible career paths and the Master of Engineering will help me to achieve my ambition of Chartered Engineer Status. The practical work offered is particularly important to me and I am looking forward to developing the practical skills gained during my GCSE Design and Technology. Furthermore, I am very keen to develop my computational skills particularly in the area of Computer Aided Design."

6. Volunteering on a community farm, working around and with animals made me realise Veterinary Medicine was the perfect career for me. To be able to combine my lifetime enthusiasm for science and love of animals excites me as I can help improve the well-being of animals and humans, whether this be caring for pets loved by their owner or preventing disease outbreaks in animals, which can also have an impact on human lifestyle and health. The opportunity to be at the forefront of scientific developments in an ever advancing field, and being able to use such advances in the world of Veterinary Medicine is something I relish. This along with the great variety available in the profession makes a veterinary career an ideal occupation for me.

Action -

What you have done to pursue your subject and importantly, some of your insights. Note the *reflection* on what the student learned / enjoyed about these experiences.

1. "During a work placement with Biopharma, a small company which offers consultation on freeze-drying chemicals I experienced practical industrial chemistry. The analysis of the behaviour of unfamiliar compounds under extreme conditions inspired me to pursue the study of science. I have developed my interest in science by reading around the subject, regularly reading New Scientist and other science books. My summer reading included 'Why Chemical Reactions Happen' (Wothers and Keeler) which indulged my curiosity for new explanations and models of chemistry though in some respects the book asked more questions than it answered! For example I would relish a more mathematical approach to the formation of atomic and molecular electron orbitals. Competing in scientific competitions has developed my analytical and theoretical skills. In Year 11 I was part of the team who entered the 'Top of the Bench' chemistry competition. We came second in the national final where I was the only student to score 100% in the theory paper. Last year my essay was commended in the Peterhouse Kelvin Science essay competition. I received a silver certificate in the Chemistry Olympiad and was in the school team which reached the final of the RSC's Chemical Analyst competition. Besides adding to my knowledge of the subject, this gave me more experience of working in small groups and solving unfamiliar problems. I won gold certificates in the UK Maths Challenge at all levels and a merit in the Kangaroo International round in 2007. In the National Cipher Challenge last year my team was joint 4th and I won a silver certificate in the Year 12 physics challenge."

2. “I have attended court hearings on criminal cases (varying from rape to theft) and have drawn useful practical legal knowledge from it, such as an understanding of the hierarchy of the courts. In addition to this I have undertaken work experience in the past two years at a number of law firms. Upon exposure to the varied tasks undertaken by a lawyer, I was genuinely excited by the nature of the work. The experience imparted to me an appreciation for the breadth of the law. For example, I initially held the idea that conveyancing was a mundane and narrow area of the law; however, upon witnessing it in practice, I realised it actually offered a wealth of intellectual challenges. The prospect of diving into such a vast arena as law is at once daunting and exhilarating. From a practical viewpoint, I developed a greater sense of perseverance. The tasks I undertook were sometimes mundane, but I completed them diligently to progress onto the more stimulating tasks.
- The subjects I am studying have prepared me well for a course in Law. English literature has given me the relevant expertise to work with the intricacies of language. As well as this the sense of moral judgement I have attained will be useful in studying Law. In addition being bilingual (Mandarin) affords me a greater cultural understanding. On a more practical basis, the reading involved will hopefully have prepared me for the quantity of texts to be consumed in a Law course. Complementing this aptitude with language is the sense of logic and meticulousness I have derived from studying the sciences. I enjoy the pragmatism required to unravel a science problem which will help me when applying the law to practical problems.”
3. “Through my AS History and Politics courses I developed a keen interest in modern British political history, derived particularly from its diversity and huge significance. One of the main attractions of a history course at university is the opportunity to expand my study of British history to beyond the 20th century. In preparation for this, I have enjoyed reading ‘Monarchy - England and her rulers from the Tudors to the Windsors’ by David Starkey, which has provided a captivating taster for this period and compels me to explore in more detail events such as ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688’.
- My other particular field of interest is Byzantine history. Never having had an opportunity to study this period in history at school, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading about the surviving regions of the Roman Empire by ‘Byzantium - the Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire’ by Judith Herrin. I became intrigued by the huge significance of this empire in the development of both Orthodox Christianity and Islam, provoking questions about how close much of Europe came to being incorporated into the Islamic Empire.
- In a History degree, I would relish the diverse mixture of other topics available and the opportunity to experience historiography and discuss the theory and philosophy of history. This became of particular interest to me after reading ‘In Defence of History’ by Richard Evans.
- To further my own knowledge and skills I have made several visits to the National Archives, where I was able to examine documents on the D-Day landings, the Suffragette movement and was able to apply my language skills to reading a French account of the Battle of the Somme. Both the content and presentation of the documents were intriguing as I gained first hand experience of independent research using original documents, as performed by professional historians. One of my visits was combined with a History Masterclass held by Peter Claus of Oxford University, whose talk and discussion session stretched my historical thought beyond school parameters. This experience of more advanced historical tutoring and discussion convinced me of the merits of a History degree.”
4. “My regular participation in puzzle journals such as the PSJ and the mathematical Gazette student problems in which I achieved first prize, provide an outlet for my enthusiasm and recognition of my ability. They allow me to apply the techniques I

have learnt in challenging and occasionally practical ways. My enjoyment of solving an increasing number of varied problems has led to participation both in intermediate and senior maths challenges, achieving mostly gold and one silver, as well as the Senior Team Challenge where we came fourth in the region. I have also been awarded the Year 12 science prize for outstanding achievement. I try to pass my enthusiasm on to others and have helped younger students, both at my school and primary schools to understand many new concepts and to have the opportunity to enjoy harder problems. The 'Patterns in Mathematics' day with London University allowed me to discover more about the real life applications of the subject as well as further broadening my knowledge of unfamiliar topics. I have often programmed and developed software mainly for statistics as well as pure maths and discover many new areas of mathematics through problems I encounter. I have found books such as 'the Music of the Primes' an invaluable reference for this as they draw together maths and computing, in this case with a focus on encryption and primality tests. My curiosity also includes the history of mathematics, starting last year with the BBC program 'The Story of Maths' and continuing recently when I read 'e, The Story of a Number', however I personally find that applying mathematics to problems still holds more enjoyment."

5. "Through my work experience with Qinetiq I discovered my current passion for aerospace engineering particularly with regards to rotary wing aircraft. To supplement my knowledge in this area, I have read 'Principles of Helicopter Flight' by W J Wagtendonk which has proved very informative. The module on fluid mechanics offered in the university course will further help me to understand this area of engineering. I had the opportunity to work on one of the eight Chinook MkIII helicopters which are being downgraded to MkII before deployment to Afganistan. Due to the time pressures imposed, I learnt the importance of working in a cohesive team and also of communicating and promptly solving any problems that arose. I am equally fascinated by the research and testing that is going into making the aerospace industry more environmentally friendly. With the threat of climate change and the EU's target that commercial airlines should run on biofuels by 2020, the pressure on companies to develop cleaner fuels and more fuel efficient aeroplanes is great. To keep up to date with these developments I frequently read the online journal 'Green Aviation'. I studied an Open University module entitled 'Robotics and the Meaning of Life'. To supplement my schoolwork, I read 'New Scientist' and engineering magazines. I attended a week long Headstart course at Warwick University where I was sent the task of designing and constructing a model aircraft. The task taught me the importance of continual testing and design improvement in order to get the best possible finished product. Test and evaluation was also emphasised at a work experience week I completed with Stannah Stairlifts where I took part in meetings to solve problems with the latest design for lifts on curved staircases."
6. Studying Biology for A level has provided me with the fuel to further my fascination for the human body and the way in which it works. It also suits my inquisitive nature especially when given the opportunity to work beyond the requirements of the syllabus and delve further in depth into each topic. I completed a number of in depth research projects both in school and out. After attending a Medlink Conference at Nottingham University to enhance my understanding of the role of a doctor, I decided to write a medical research paper with a colleague about the uses of embryonic stem cells in the treatment of cancer which was published with a distinction. We developed an idea using our in depth research, then formulated a method in which embryonic stem cells could be differentiated to become cytotoxic T cells with the genetic information of the patient able to cause apoptosis in cancerous tissue. This experience improved my ability to work as part of a team and also to manage my time effectively especially

during the periods of time where I worked independently which I found as rewarding as working within a team.

Chemistry has been an excellent opportunity to gain a thorough understanding of chemical reactions and I have further linked this knowledge to an Open University course named Molecules, Medicines and Drugs which has proved extremely interesting and has given me insight into pharmacology and the cellular effects it has in humans. This was another great chance to work independently. The skills I developed are invaluable and will hopefully prove extremely useful at medical school.

You - Extra-curricular activities and experiences which will make you the ideal student. Again, note the focus on how these display strengths and skills, rather than just listing activities.

1. "In addition to my studies, I have shown responsibility and dedication through my six year commitment to the school choir and string ensemble and I was house Music Captain. I play the violin outside school in the local and county Youth Orchestras. Working with others in large groups has taught me valuable skills, especially teamwork and perseverance. My extensive commitment to music has demonstrated my ability to manage time effectively and my capacity for work. I completed the DofE Silver Award last year which encouraged me to improve my swimming. I then attended a one week lifeguarding course, gaining the RLSS pool lifeguard qualification. This shows my ability to learn new skills and apply them in a practical situation. I am a Senior Prefect with responsibility for the school library, demonstrating my maturity and ability to hold a position of trust. I take every opportunity to extend my knowledge and learning in all fields: over the past three years I have studied two additional languages in my own time, Chinese and Latin. I have enjoyed both of these as stimulating challenges to my ability to balance commitments."
2. "I have enjoyed a number of extra academic pursuits. My participation in such events as the Chemistry Olympiad for Year 13 students (achieving a silver medal), the RSC School's Practical Chemistry competition (reaching the national finals) the Senior Maths Challenge (silver) the Physics Challenge (silver) and Physics Olympiad have challenged my aptitude by forcing me to apply my skills in unfamiliar situations. I believe I have the determination and drive necessary to rise to the academic demands of studying law. I have achieved Grade 8 Classical Guitar with Merit after playing for 6 years. Furthermore I have been a key member of the same local football team for 8 years. I believe by pursuing these activities for an extended period, I have cultivated a sense of dedication. Also my work as a Senior Prefect has furthered both my leadership and team working skills. By successfully balancing all these activities with my academic life, my organisational skills have developed."
3. "I currently play three instruments demonstrating careful time management and a passion for progress though primarily independent effort. On the piano I have achieved Grade 5 and am working towards Grade 7. Over 8 years I have also steadily developed my proficiency on the guitar and have enjoyed playing the drums for several months. My main sporting activity is regular games for a Salisbury hockey team. Over the past year, I have been able to develop greater personal initiative and time management through my work at a local pub. Through school debating I have been able to develop the skills I use in the study of History such as information analysis and presenting a coherent argument. At

university I hope to enhance these skills whilst also exploring vast and fascinating periods of history and discussing advanced and mentally stretching theories and interpretations of history.”

4. “Although happily immersed in mathematical problems, I do balance my academic work with time spent enjoying sports and pastimes. Through involvement in karate I have developed my concentration, communication and particularly leadership skills. Over 9 years I have now reached black belt 2nd degree, enough to be able to instruct others and help with the physically disabled, and I enjoy the new challenge this can bring. I also enjoy trumpet playing and have been playing for almost a decade. At the start of my time in the 6th Form I joined the senior wind band at Salisbury Area Youth Musicians which is now a highlight of my week. I have now become a confident team player and benefit from the relaxation this time provides.
I love sharing my knowledge with others and am voluntarily leading tours at Salisbury Cathedral in English and French as well as teaching younger children to swim at a local school. Both have encompassed the need for rapid decision making and the need to swiftly extend my own knowledge in a range of topics. In addition being a Senior Prefect in charge of IT reflects my ability to rise to new challenges and accept responsibility. However, while striving for success in these activities I find it important to relax and to this extent I savour a good book or an opportunity to ride a bike over rough terrain.”

5. “Whilst completing my Bronze, Silver and Gold DofE Awards I have performed community service in my local area, cutting grass and doing other gardening jobs. Over the last few years I have developed this into a self run business. Meeting the demands of my customers each week has taught me good time management and communication skills. The Duke of Edinburgh expeditions have also proved invaluable, developing good teamwork and leadership qualities. I have been selected as a Senior Prefect and have been nominated as Head of Charity Committee. Running fundraising events and leading a team of people have really demonstrated my strong organisational skills. In a recent school play, I greatly enjoyed working as a lighting and sound engineer and this is something that I would like to continue at university.
I recently designed and constructed a tree house in my garden and found that wood has its advantages as a material (in jointing for instance) but equally has disadvantages (for example decay) which I learnt to overcome. The project confirmed my ambition to make engineering my career.”

d. The Cambridge Supplementary Statement

Cambridge requires applicants to complete a Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ). Students have to supply their AS module scores (where taken), which Cambridge has taken very seriously in considering who to interview and offer a place – you must do this accurately. The Supplementary Application Questionnaire also offers the chance for candidates to add to their UCAS personal statement (although this part of the Questionnaire is not compulsory, most students do complete it).

The Cambridge statement allows you to be more specific about the specific course you are applying for; this is important if you are applying for slightly different courses at other institutions – for example, if applying for Natural Sciences at Cambridge but Physics elsewhere, or for Human Social and Political Sciences at Cambridge, but Politics elsewhere. You will have much more limited space compared to the Personal Statement so your focus should be on what attracts you to Cambridge’s specific course and the opportunities it

provides. You should not focus on your chosen college in this statement as you may well be asked for interview at other, very different colleges.

In his guide on Oxbridge Applications, the Economics expert Russell Tillson quotes a successful Social and Political Science applicant to Cambridge who was able to combine their new reading, topics of interest and the appeal of the Cambridge course within their Supplementary statement:

“I have been excited by political argument since the 1997 General Election and so my choice of Politics A Level was an obvious one. Through my formal study and private research I have become increasingly fascinated by decision-making processes and by conflicting views about the role of governments and their relationships with citizens, in both a British and an American context. I found myself dipping into books beyond the syllabus, several of which had a sociological flavour (such as E Goffman’s ‘Asylums’) and after discussions with teachers, I concluded some time ago that the SPS Tripos offered exactly what I wanted by way of university study. I am drawn to the flexibility and breadth offered in SPS and particularly to its cross-curricular themes. It seems to address real and contemporary issues in a highly analytical way and I relish the opportunity to develop further my understanding of the modern State, as well as of controversial issues such as apathy in elections, protest against globalisation, theories of deviance and approached to criminal behaviour.”
(A Guide to Oxbridge Application in Economics in the Social Sciences – Russell Tillson, 2002).

e. **Deadlines**

Do be aware that the submission date for early application courses is 15 October. At BWS, we have an earlier deadline to enable applications to be checked – **Friday 23rd September 2016**. This is the absolute deadline as it gives your teachers and the Sixth Form Office enough time to draft and finalise your references. If your application requires a test (as most Oxford applications do, as well as Law and Medicine applications elsewhere) you should also see Mrs Glasson by this date to book the test sitting.

If successful, you may hear back in November requesting work to be sent (typical for humanities courses, uncommon for other applications). Oxbridge interviews are usually held in December but Medical and Vet courses may hold interviews over several months from early November. Interview dates will be available on the respective Oxford and Cambridge websites – **make sure you have checked these and blocked them off in your diary**. Usually students get a couple of weeks’ notice of an interview, but in some subjects applicants may hear less than a week in advance.

2. **Sending Work**

Depending on subject, you may well be asked to send a sample of your work to your tutors, for example two essays written in your chosen subject(s). This is a further opportunity to distinguish yourself from the other students competing for places on your course. The advice below will help you to make the most of this opportunity.

a. **Selecting/writing your work**

You may already have some excellent marked essays in your file, in which case your task is to carefully select the most appropriate to send, following discussion with your teachers. If you would not be proud to send any existing essays, you should set about writing them. Whether selecting or writing, you should bear the following points in mind.

Required Criteria

Make sure your essay meets the specific request you have been sent. Usually it must be marked work produced in the usual course of your studies. Sometimes an essay from the later part of Year 12 can be sent, sometimes the work must be from Year 13, which may prove quite restrictive as you may only have done two or three essays in your subject of application by the autumn half-term. There may be other constraints: in History, for example, Oxford requires that submitted work must not involve sources work. There may be a word limit which you must ensure you keep within.

Topic

Ensure as far as possible that you are interested in the topic of your essay. This will be of great benefit when you are tackling the question, reading up on the relevant issues and discussing it with your college tutors. As you are sending the original copy with teacher marks on it, ensure you have kept your own photocopy to help you prepare for interview discussion of the essay.

Question

The question should be evaluative in nature. This will allow you to build up an argument for or against a statement, or to assess the strength of different arguments around an issue. The strength of university essays are judged on the power of argument, how evidence is analysed and logical conclusions are formed and how well opposing points of view are countered.

Skilful writing

The skills you are assessed on at A Level (knowledge, application, analysis, evaluation) should be demonstrated to a high level in your essays, so too is faultless grammar, spelling and punctuation. Good planning, drafting, self-evaluation and improvement will contribute to an impressive submission.

Marking

Work must be marked by your subject teacher before it is sent. Although their comments may appear critical of your work, they are essential to help you develop your argument or areas you have overlooked and importantly can assist your preparation in discussing the essay at interview. If you are writing essays specifically to submit to Oxbridge, you should discuss the question you choose with your teacher in advance, and ensure they have plenty of time to mark it on top of all their usual work.

b. Preparing to talk about your work

The interview may (or may not) involve a discussion of your work so you should re-read your essays before an interview. It is advisable to address the following points.

Your assertions and conclusions

Throughout your essay it is likely that you may have strong assertive statements. These would have been based on evidence (theoretical or empirical) but ask yourself, could another author have come up with another conclusion? Play 'devil's advocate' and jot down valid counter arguments - could you answer them?

Your teacher's comments

It is important to address all your teacher's comments on your essay. These may be points of clarification of knowledge or evidence which it is vital to be certain of before discussing the

topic. Try to discuss the essay with your teacher before you go off for interview. If they are busy, ask a friend or Academic Mentor for a few moments of their time, talking about your work will clarify your thoughts.

Further reading

Do read at least one commentary/article/paper/book on the topic between writing the essay and attending an interview. This will inform and develop your opinions and provide you with more valid evidence to discuss. It's far from a bad thing to say at interview that you have changed your mind on the issue since you wrote the essay, as a result of further reading you have done (and it is quite common for them to directly ask you this).

3. The Tests

Oxford has used a range of admissions tests for some years; Cambridge mostly has not, relying on the scores in AS modules to differentiate between applicants – but the arrival of linear A levels has led Cambridge to introduce tests in most subjects in autumn 2016.

a. Oxford

Tests required by Oxford may change from year to year. **It is therefore very important that you check admissions information and procedures in detail.** Information about all requirements and sample papers can be found on the university website - http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/applying_to_oxford/tests/index.html

Most tests are taken in school on the same day (2nd November in 2016), although Law Students take the LNAT exam at a test centre, booking one from several possible dates (between 1 September and 20 October in 2016). To guarantee that you can take the LNAT in time, you will need to register and book an LNAT test slot by the start of October - <http://www.lnat.ac.uk/registration/dates-and-deadlines/>).

See Mr Endersby for details and Mrs Glasson to register for tests taken in school. **Registration for most tests is by 15th October 2015**, except for the BMAT (1st October 2015) or LNAT (see above). You will need to pay yourself to enter the LNAT, UKCAT and BMAT; the other tests have no charge.

The following is a guide only, covering the most common tests:

Oxford Tests 2016

		TEST DATE	
HAT	History Aptitude Test	2.11.15	Courses involving History
ELAT	English Literature Admissions Test	2.11.15	Courses involving English (but those applying for History and English take the HAT and not the ELAT)
BMAT	BioMedical Admissions Test	2.11.15	Medicine, Biomedical Sciences
LNAT	Law National Admissions Test	(See above)	Law
TSA	Thinking Skills Assessment	2.11.15	Chemistry; Philosophy, Politics & Economics (PPE); Economics and Management (E&M); Geography, Human Sciences; Experimental Psychology (EP) or Psychology; Philosophy and Linguistics (PPL) courses.
MAT	Mathematics Aptitude Test	2.11.15	Mathematics or Computer Science courses
PAT	Physics Aptitude Test	2.11.15	Physics, Physics and Philosophy, any Engineering science course; Materials Science
MLAT	Modern Languages Admissions Test	2.11.15	Courses involving Modern Languages (including all joint courses and Linguistics courses)

CAT	Classics Admissions Test	2.11.15	Sat by all applying for Classics (except Classical Archaeology and Ancient History). Those with Latin or Greek take a test in that language. Those without Latin or Greek take the Classics Language Aptitude Test.
OLAT	Oriental Languages Aptitude Test	2.11.15	For Oriental Studies courses, European and Middle Eastern Languages, and for some Classics with Oriental Studies and Theology with Oriental Studies courses.
Philosophy Test	Philosophy	2.11.15	For the Philosophy and Theology course (and elements used for Modern Languages with Philosophy applicants when they sit the MLAT test papers)
	Interview tests		Fine Art, Music

b. Cambridge

Cambridge are adopting a range of admissions tests in 2016/17. Some will be sat before interview, at school on **2nd November 2016** (as with Oxford, although in almost all cases, the tests in the same subject will be different in type). Other subjects will set tests at interview in December. In a few subjects different colleges will set their own tests or tasks at interview. A summary is below, but check the details for your own subject:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/tests/>

Pre-interview tests sat at School on 2nd November 2016

Subject	Format
Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)
Asian and Middle Eastern Studies	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)
Economics	Problem-solving/maths MCQs (80 minutes) Data response/comprehension (40 minutes)
Engineering	Maths/Physics MCQs ¹ (80 minutes) Engineering specific questions (40 minutes)
English	ELAT (90 minutes)
Geography	TSA section (40 minutes) Comprehension (40 minutes) Data response (40 minutes)
History	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)
History and Modern Languages	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)

History and Politics	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)
Human, Social, and Political Sciences	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)
Medicine	BMAT
Natural Sciences	Maths/Science MCQs ¹ (80 minutes) In-depth Science questions (40 minutes)
Psychological and Behavioural Sciences	TSA section (40 minutes) Maths/science MCQs ¹ (40 minutes) Essay/text response element (40 minutes)
Theology, Religion, and Philosophy of Religion	Comprehension (60 minutes) Essay/text response element (60 minutes)
Veterinary Medicine	BMAT

¹ MCQs – multiple-choice questions

N.B. Chemical Engineering - applicants to Chemical Engineering will sit the assessment relevant to their chosen route/first-year course (Engineering or Natural Sciences)

At interview assessment

The following subjects will set tests at the time of interview in December:

- Archaeology
- Architecture
- Classics
- Computer Science
- Education
- History and Modern Languages
- History of Art
- Land Economy
- Law
- Linguistics
- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Philosophy

See website for details –

<http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/admissions-assessments/at-interview>

Other Subjects

Maths - There's no common format written assessment for Mathematics (applicants will continue to sit STEP in June 2017) – Colleges will assess aptitude, knowledge base and potential through short tasks at the time of interview.

STEP – Sixth Term Examination Papers in Mathematics: required for mathematics courses and for engineering and computer science in some colleges. STEP grades will be made part of an offer in Mathematics, and sat in June of 2017.

Music - there's no common format written assessment for Music – Colleges will assess aptitude, knowledge base and potential through short tasks at the time of interview

c. Practical tips on how to prepare for tests

Oxford would claim that success in their tests cannot be taught; there is some truth in this, but familiarity and practice are certainly valuable in preparing for any of the aptitude tests. Past papers are available online, together with mark schemes, and you should spend time looking through these to see what kind of questions are likely, what approach is needed, and what time constraints you will be under. Many logical, problem solving and intelligence tests are to formula and most successful candidates have usually spent hours going through examples. Inevitably, the first you attempt will be wrong, very wrong! Check the answer and try to understand why. Try another question though it is likely you will be wrong again! But do not fear, slowly you may start to see why certain answers are right and before long you may eventually get some right on your own. Importantly, do not give up, practice will lead to progress. Perfection is not normally expected, so although you must not give up, do not 'beat yourself' up either.

d. Test results

Except for BMAT, test results go to the universities before being released to the student who took them. Results are usually available to students in mid-January (early Feb for LNAT), after all interviews have taken place and offers sent out. The way in which results are obtained varies – for some tests you can log in to the exam company's website with a special username and password, for others you have to ask the college to which you applied. BMAT results are released to students in late November – i.e. before most Medicine interviews take place.

e. What is a good result?

It is impossible to say what a good test result is, as different subjects and colleges may treat them in different ways, and all are weighing the test result against other information, such as GCSE grades, AS module marks, etc. As a single example, in Oxford's 2012 History Aptitude Test, the average HAT score of applicants who were interviewed was 62%, and the average HAT score of applicants who were offered a place was 68%.

4. The Interview

a. The interview process at Oxford

Oxford colleges are likely to ask you to stay at the college for approximately 3-4 days in early to mid-December for the interview process. During this time you might be asked to sit a college test as well as have between one and three interviews with college tutors, and possibly be called for interviews at other colleges. There is a variety of things you will be doing and you will be expected to be on time so it is important you get organised. You will either be given an individual timetable or you will be asked to refer to a central notice board which will detail all your interview and test times. In addition, most colleges will have a team of current undergraduates on hand to show you to interview rooms or other colleges. College porters, found in the Porter's Lodge (at the entrance of the college) are an invaluable source of help also (but be very polite to them!).

The interview at your college will usually be conducted by two college tutors and will primarily be focused on your subject. If you have applied for a joint honours (e.g. Philosophy, Politics and Economics) you will be interviewed by tutors in each subject. In the interview some tutors may well ask you about the subject interests you expressed in the Personal Statement or essays you submitted, in which case, they will probably present you with an opposing argument or some new information that you will have to consider. It is likely that all tutors will give you a problem or discussion topic that you have not considered before, possibly on material given to you in advance of the interview. It is likely to be very difficult and equally as likely that you will not be able to solve it. The point to the exercise is to see how you would set about solving the problem. This may involve answering their questions (and asking them some), identifying conflicts and proposing what information you would need to find out to solve the problem. Do remember that interviews at Oxford are generally with the academics that will be tutoring you if you gain a place. Their task then is not only to assess your academic ability but also your 'teachability' so it is important that you interact with them and can take on board new information and work with it. Having a closed unresponsive student is frustrating for any tutor.

Due to high demand for some colleges and low demand for others, 'pooling' takes place to ensure that strong candidates have the best chance of receiving an Oxford offer, although not necessarily at the college they first applied to. Occasionally this occurs early on, and an applicant may be called up for interview to a different college from that they originally applied to. Mostly, however, the original college interviews you at the start of your time in Oxford, and you wait to see if you will also be called for interview at other colleges for their consideration also (often at quite short notice). The Tutors at your first college may regard you highly, but there may not be enough room at their college for that academic year. Don't assume that because you've been asked to interview elsewhere you didn't do well at in your first interviews – you may well still get an offer from the first college.

Lastly, it may seem a daunting amount of time to be in an Oxford college especially since most of your time will be 'free'. Once your interviews are over, take the opportunity to relax with the other interviewees and see the town, although you should take some school work up to do as otherwise you may have a lot of catching up to do when you get back to BWS. Most interviewees really enjoy their time there. See this web page for more info and example videos - <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews>

b. The interview process at Cambridge

Cambridge colleges are likely to have two interviews; one with a subject tutor to ascertain your aptitude for your chosen subject, the other may be a more general academic interview to assess your general commitment to your studies, but a second subject-based interview is now more common. These are likely to take place on one day in December. You may

however be required to stay overnight in which case the college will provide accommodation. If you are unsuccessful in your application to your chosen college you may be 'pooled' for other colleges' consideration, meaning they consider you to be definitely good enough to study at Cambridge, but that your initial college didn't have room for you. You may therefore be asked back to another college for interview, which is likely to take place in January, although in 2013 a BWS candidate was offered a place at another college without being re-interviewed.

The Academic Interview(s)

Conducted by a specialist in your subject whose job it will be find out "what you know and how you use what you know to think" (<http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/what-are-we-looking-for>). So you might find yourself discussing topics you mentioned in your Personal Statement, or explored in your essays, and they may give you some material to study in the twenty minutes or so before the interview and then discuss that. Importantly, it is likely the tutor will present you with new, additional information and expect you to amend your thoughts or to resolve some sort of conflict. It is unlikely you will be familiar with the information but you must use it if you think it will have an impact on some conclusions you have previously reached. As long as you demonstrate some logical reasoning you will be on your way to satisfying the interviewer.

The General Academic Interview

General interviews are now much less common as many colleges prefer to give a second subject interview, but they do still take place. A General Academic Interview attempts to achieve a more holistic view of you as a candidate beyond your subject knowledge; importantly, it will seek to assess your general academic skills and your commitment to your studies. You may well be asked to expand on things in your personal statement, as well as why you chose to apply to Cambridge; your future career aspirations may also come up.

Examples of 'mock interviews' can be seen at:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/interviews/involve.html>

c. Practical tips on how to prepare for interviews

Read

This is possibly the most important way to prepare. Ensure you have read (and re-read) the following:

- Personal Statement
- Essays
- A subject based book
- Current journals in your subject or related subjects
- Books you refer to in your Personal Statement

Check

Colleges usually provide some information about what to expect at interview, which could include a test, so check this carefully. There may also be information posted online to ensure you know what to expect.

Watch

Both Oxford's and Cambridge's admissions websites have videos of sample videos in a variety of subjects – well worth watching to gain an insight into how the process works and to reassure yourself that it isn't that frightening.

Test yourself

The Sixth Form Office has a folder of interview feedback sheets filled in by past BWS students, including examples of the questions they were asked. Do browse through and make a note of some questions, then go away and think about how you would start answering them – you could then discuss this with other students in a study group or a member of staff.

Mock interviews

Interviews will be arranged for you through the Sixth Form Office. As well as interviews at BWS, we will seek to organise an interview with someone you do not already know in order to provide a more realistic experience for you.

Be confident

Being asked for an interview at one of the most prestigious universities in the world is an honour in itself. Tutors would have looked at many applications and chosen to interview perhaps only a half of them: you have already distinguished yourself, well done! Do not be put off by the other candidates who, due to superficial appearances, you think may have an advantage. The tutors have decided that they want to talk to **you**. When being interviewed, discuss your thoughts with confidence but at the same time, be confident enough to amend or change your mind if new evidence is presented or you are convincingly persuaded. It is a myth that tutors like students who defend their initial viewpoint come what may, regardless of the evidence presented to them.

Be flexible

Colleges and subjects do vary in how they conduct interviews, and even change from year to year, so don't assume too much, even if you've talked to someone who was interviewed previously for your subject. The experience will vary in how many interviews you have, how many people are involved, whether there are pre-interview tests or reading to do, whether they ask about your personal statement or submitted work, etc. – but what they will have in common is a desire to find out how you think and what kind of student you might make. By not having too many preconceptions, you won't be put off by the unexpected - be confident in your ability and answer as best you can.

Relax

Being relaxed will help you to concentrate, think and answer more fluently. Wear clothes that you are comfortable in and which look reasonably smart, sit in a comfortable position and don't hesitate to smile and make eye contact with your interviewers. If you can, try to enjoy yourself!

d. Examples of Oxbridge and Medicine/Veterinary Medicine interview questions as experienced by BWS students:

History, St John's, Oxford

First History Interview

- Discussion of the essay I submitted on Daniel O'Connell ('How successful was Daniel O'Connell as an Irish Nationalist leader?'), issues surrounding nationalism and leadership in Irish politics in the last two centuries, Notions of nationalism in the Irish context. Questions like "Was O'Connell representative of Irish national opinion/the 'masses'?" and "Have any leaders in Irish politics been representative of the Irish?"
- Some discussion of politics/issues in contemporary Northern Ireland
- Discussion of Venezuelan politics (due to mention of World Challenge trip there)
- General discussion of A Level course

Second History Interview

- Discussion of Mussolini essay ('Was Mussolini an all-powerful dictator?')
- A Level course
- Asked what Kershaw meant by saying Hitler had a 'weak dictatorship'
- Asked me about reading I did apart from History books
- 'Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?'

General Interview

- Discussion of A Level course, what I liked/disliked. Discussion about what the term 'valid' meant in History
- Discussion of the merit of studying different time periods/countries which may not seem historically 'relevant' to the student
- Exercise using primary source material – pick a random object from the table (choices include a banana, two bent spoons and several postcards) and explain what a historian could use them for
- General discussion on hobbies, leisure reading, gap year etc
- 'Are there any questions you would like to ask?'
- Is there anything you would like to say about yourself which has not been covered in these interviews?' (i.e. what do you want me to ask you?).

Philosophy, Politics and Economics, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford

Politics and Philosophy Interview (36 minutes)

The first half dealt with politics and included questions about the Personal Statements e.g. why are you concerned about the role of the judiciary and monarchy in politics?

Questions about work submitted:

- Why did you choose this particular work?
- Why are you interested in the subject of the essay?
- Asked to summarise an essay.

Prepared question – candidates for Politics had to collect a question from the college secretary and prepare for 16 minutes beforehand. Questions:

- Why is it important to hold governments to account on elections?
- Name the important features which constitute a democracy
- Could Britain be made more democratic, if so, how?

The second part dealt with Philosophy:

- Should we be tolerant of people who are anti-tolerance, e.g.: treatment of women in Afghanistan?
- Is it right for other countries to interfere in the internal affairs of another? Why?
- How do you know you are not in a nightmare at this moment?
- If I shoot an arrow at you, first it must get half way, therefore it must get a quarter of the way, therefore it must get an eighth of the way and so on. Therefore the arrow will never reach you, explain.

Economics Interview (36 minutes)

- Asked about work submitted (Japanese investment in the UK)
- Impact of the National Minimum Wage
- Impact of the single currency and the fact that Britain is not joining
- Most other questions were linked to the impact of Europe.

English, St Hugh's, Oxford

First English Interview

The first part was about the literature mentioned in the Personal Statement:

- Why do you want to study English?
- What did you like about Hardy's 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'?
- Discussion about Hardy's view of the world, whether it is difficult to identify with work written so long ago and whether personal identification is necessary to enjoy a text
- Discussion about the difference of reading a Shakespeare play and seeing it performed.

The second part of the interview was about a poem ('Virtue', George Herbert) left outside the interview room which students read for approximately 15 minutes prior to the interview. Questions/tasks:

- Had to read the poem aloud and explain what it was about
- Asked about the varying meaning of the word "sweet" which was repeated several times throughout the poem
- Asked about a particular image in the poem being "like season'd timber".
- Asked if there was anything I wanted to say or ask about the poem.

Second English Interview

The first part was about English and literature mentioned in the Personal Statement:

- Why do you want to study English?
- What do you think you will gain from studying English personally and career wise?
- What is the purpose of literature? Discussion proceeded to Wilde's view on the purpose of art and the extent to which the student agreed with Wilde's opinion
- The presence of beauty in Hardy's 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'?
- Discussion of whether it is necessary to understand the historical context of literature.

The second part of the interview was about a poem ('Composed upon Westminster Bridge, 3 September 1802', William Wordsworth) left outside the interview room which students read for approximately 15 minutes prior to the interview. Questions/tasks:

- Had to read the poem aloud and explain what it was about
- Discussed whether it was written as a sonnet
- Poet's feelings in the poem and what devices he used to convey them

- Asked what I knew about Wordsworth
- Asked why Wordsworth wrote about the beauty of the city when he was primarily a nature poet
- Examples of personification and the effect of them.

General Interview

- Why English?
- Could reading so much for a degree take the pleasure out of reading?
- What would you say in response to a politician who claimed it was a waste of time and money to do a degree in English?
- Would it have helped if Shakespeare did a degree in English? (and he said it did perhaps help Milton who studied at Christ's)
- Why do poets always have such miserable lives?
- Contribution to college life
- Why this college
- Any questions?

Engineering, Robinson, Cambridge

Maths Interview

Questions on:

- Differentiation
- Simple harmonic motion
- Indices, golden ratio
- The following problem: a sheep on a lead (tied to the corner) in a square field of length eats half the grass, what is the length of the lead? What about if the field is an equilateral triangle?

Physics Interview

- General questions about choosing engineering and Personal Statement
- Projectile question
- What happens if you light a match in a space rocket?
- Questions about the forces acting on a car.

General Interview

- Why engineering?
- Why Cambridge?
- Why did you drop D&T?
- Questions on engines and hydrogen-powered fuel cell cars (these questions would have been on interests within engineering I had mentioned in my personal statement)

Maths, St Catherine's College, Cambridge

Maths Interview

The candidate was provided with paper [sometimes you're given a pen and pointed to a whiteboard] and asked mathematical questions for 30 minutes. The candidate completed the following 5 Qs:

1. Prove that $m^3 - m$ is always divisible by 6
2. Sketch the graph of e^x/x . When I suggested as part of the question that the graph increases to infinity as x increases, she asked me to prove this. I gave her some ideas but then she gave me the series expansion of e^x and asked me a different question relating to this. I then linked what she had shown me back to the original question to prove what I couldn't conclusively before.
3. This was a rather difficult integration, a type I had not met before. She did not expect me to solve it but instead gave me hints to solve the bits I have not seen before and expected me to use what she had said and work with my existing techniques to solve it.
4. A large cube of side length n units is painted green on each side. The cube is cut up into smaller cubes by making $n-1$ parallel slits (of spacing 1 unit) through the cube on each side (both horizontal and vertical). I was then asked to devise an expression for the number of cubes formed with 0, 1, 2 and 3 painted sides. I was not allowed to use the paper for this question.
5. This was a question regarding 2nd order differential equations. The interviewer simply asked me different questions about the nature of the equations, for example relating to complex or real roots of the auxiliary equation. Then I listed for the last minute of the interview as she aimed to prove something new to me regarding 2nd order differential equations.

General Interview

This lasted 30 minutes with no particular themes, more like an open discussion about the following varied topics:

- Potters Bar rail crash (topical at the time)
- Candidate's dislike of Chemistry course
- Leisure activities
- Other subjects
- Basic mathematical discussion

Medicine at Birmingham University

Multiple-Mini format – 4 stations x 6 minutes per station – told briefly before the day what each station would involve.

- role play: persuading a medical student to do talks at my school
- Discussing work experience: give 2 e.g.s of experiences during work experience where you witnessed the attributes of a doctor
- Medical ethics: fellow med student wanting to visit ill grandma, she asks you to sign her in on the med school lecture register
- Data analysis: given data from a study and had to interpret it to an interviewer (who was quite dismissive and abrupt – I suspected it was to test how I coped under pressure)

Medicine at Oxford

3 formal interviews – 2 interviewers at each.

- 1st interview – given article in advance on psychopharmacology in psychiatry. Had to talk through the article and explain aspects. Then Physics Qs and questions about aspects of my personal statement – things I'd researched.
- 2nd interview – had to interpret graphs on effects of cannabis on pain sensations. Discussion of Alzheimer's diseases and anti-psychotic drugs with double effects.
- 3rd interview – questions about neurones and optogenetic effects. Discussion of other aspects of my personal statement.

Vet Med at Nottingham

1 formal interview (2 interviewers and a dog!), a team assessment and a practical task

- Sent a questionnaire in advance asking about personal qualities, my views on aspects of the profession and my opinion on the appropriate course of action in typical veterinary situations.

- Formal interview:

- Why do you want to be a vet?
- Have you got good communication skills?
- Talk about some of your work experience
- Talk about an issue in vet science today (linked to my questionnaire responses)

- Practical task:

- Given an organ to hold, feel, describe – had to identify it (cow's tongue)
- Compare a pheasant's head and a rodent's head
- Look at an ex-ray of a skull – describe and identify
- Do a glucose test on a urine sample

- Team assessment:

- We were presented with a series of scenarios in a typical vet practice and we had to discuss them all and prioritise them for urgency and importance.

Vet Med at the Royal Veterinary College

Multiple-Mini interview format – 6 situations + a group task later

- Talking about work experience – what was interesting, what conditions you saw, etc.
- Discussing vets' roles and opinions in ethics to do with animal welfare, testing, hunting, etc.
- Comparing and contrasting two different skeletal limbs and saying what they are and why they are like that
- Ranking pictures of animals in society in order of most preferable and giving your reasons (pig in the snow, horse pulling a heavy load, dangerous and malnourished dog on a lead, mice in a small cage).
- Rank in order of priority the tasks you must do when you come into the practice in the morning, e.g. write sympathy card, clean the consultation room, treat a sick cat waiting outside, get a prescription ready.
- Work out drug dosage for a particular dog – all information and weight of dog given.
- Group task: Given 26 competencies of a newly graduated vet. As a group, you have 10 minutes to decide which are the most important.

Further Information

Sixth Form Office

For years, staff, mentors and the Sixth Form Office have advised and guided students on college/course choice, given extensive advice on Personal Statements and written a large number of references for Oxbridge applicants and are an essential source of information for any potential Oxbridge applicant.

Subject Department

Your subject Department may have more specific information about past interviews experienced by students - ask your teacher or the Head of Department. Your teachers will also be invaluable in recommending further reading.

Work Experience

If you are planning to apply for courses in any of the following vocational areas you will need to display an understanding of what is involved and **a period of work experience is very important:**

- Medicine
- Veterinary Science
- Psychology
- Architecture
- Law
- Engineering

When can you do it?

You can do work experience during holidays or on a weekly basis during term times in study periods (only with the consent of Mr Burnside - this is more likely in Year 13).

You may **not** take time out of school for any other blocks of work experience unless there are exceptional circumstances, and these must be discussed in advance with Mr Burnside, Head of Sixth Form.

Who will help and advise you?

Your mentor, Mrs Armstrong (Careers Adviser), Mr Burnside and Mr Endersby will all be able to give you help and advice about the kind of work experience you need to have. It is however, **up to you** to take the initiative over seeking advice and making arrangements.

How do you organise it?

You are responsible for making all the arrangements. These are likely to be in the following sequence:

- Seek advice about what work experience is necessary/appropriate.
- Contact work experience provider and agree provisional dates.
- Seek Mr Burnside's permission to undertake work experience if it falls within school time.
- Inform your mentor of your work experience.

Extra Curricular

Sixth Form Discussion Groups:

We encourage all applicants for Oxford and Cambridge Universities to demonstrate their love of independent learning and passion for their subject by participating regularly in a Student Discussion Forum. Members of subject staff and Sixth Form Office staff will regularly drop in to meetings but the onus is on you to organise these regular forums and determine in advance the topic for discussion and the role of participants.

Small group seminar work is the key feature of Oxbridge teaching and will also prepare you more effectively for interviews at both institutions.

Public Speaking and Debating:

We strongly recommend that all students applying for Oxbridge have a go at some public speaking or debating as it would be particularly suitable for students who lack confidence, those who would like to be able to speak effectively in public, and those likely to apply for university courses that involve interviews.

BAYS (British Association of Young Scientists):

This society is run by sixth formers under the supervision of The Head of Science and aims to develop students' interest in science by inviting some of the UK's top scientists to discuss their relevant fields and interests and how they affect the world at large.

The Politics Society

This is organised by a committee of sixth formers from both BWS and SWGS. They invite outside speakers into school on a regular basis and those studying Politics A-Level will be expected to attend. Other students may also attend if they are free.

The History Society

Also organised by sixth formers from both schools, any serious History candidate should aim to attend all their lectures by visiting speakers, including and especially those on different historical periods from the ones you are studying at A level.

Successful Student Profiles

Candidate 1

KS4 GCSE Options Geography/History/RE/French (also Latin)
Yr 11 Mock Exam Grades 7A* 1A
GCSE Grades 12A*

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Chemistry	A (292/300)	A* (590/600)
	English	A (195/200)	A* (395/400)
	Mathematics	A (285/300)	A* (585/600)
	Physics	A (300/300)	A* (596/600)
	Crit Thinking	A (160/200)	Fur Maths A* (561/600)

Cambridge Law (Gonville & Caius College)

Candidate 2

KS4 GCSE Options Music/French/Geography/History
Yr 11 Mock Exam Grades 3A* 6A 2B
GCSE Grades 5A* 2A 1B

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Music	A (296/300)	A* (596/600)
	Phil/Ethics	A (172/200)	A* (363/400)
	History	A (181/200)	A* (364/400)
	Eng Lit	A (172/200)	
	Crit Thinking	A (165/200)	

Oxford Music (Queen's College)

Candidate 3

KS4 GCSE Options French/Geography/Music/Statistics (also Latin)
Yr 11 Mock Exam Grades 3A* 4A 1B
GCSE Grades 8A* 2A 1B

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Mathematics	A (290/300)	A* (586/600)
	Chemistry	A (292/300)	A* (567/600)
	French	A (172/200)	A (337/400)
	Physics	A (300/300)	A* (530/600)

Step Maths II Grade 2
Step Maths III Grade 1

Cambridge Mathematics (Trinity College)

Candidate 4

KS4 GCSE Options Art/French/DT/Geography (also Latin)
Yr 11 Mock Exam Grades 8A* 3A
GCSE Grades 10A*

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A (281/300)	A* (581/600)
	Fur Maths	-	A* (563/600)
	Physics	A (281/300)	A* (579/600)
	DT	A (190/200)	A* (390/400)
	Crit Thinking	A (178/200)	
	Geography	A (197/200)	

Oxford Engineering (Magdalene College)

Candidate 5

KS4 GCSE Options French/Geography/History/Statistics (also Latin)
Yr 11 Mock Exam Grades 7A* 1A
GCSE Grades 11A*

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A (297/300)	A* (582/600)
	Fur Maths	-	A* (577/600)
	Chemistry	A (293/300)	A* (593/600)
	Geology	A (299/300)	A* (599/600)
	Physics	A (296/300)	A* (590/600)
	Latin	A (188.200)	

Cambridge Natural Sciences (St Catherine's College)

Candidate 6

KS4 GCSE Options French/Geography/German/Statistics
Yr 11 Mock Exam Grades 7A* 1A
GCSE Grades 11A*

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A (290/300)	A* (589/600)
	Fur Maths		A* (589/600)
	French	A (195/200)	A* (389/400)
	German	A (186/200)	A* (368/400)
	Physics	A (296/300)	A* (588/600)

Step Maths II Grade 5

Step Maths III Grade 1

Cambridge Mathematics (Clare College)

Candidate 7

KS4 GCSE Grades 10A* 1A

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A (279/300)	A* (567/600)
	Fur Maths		A* (565/600)
	Chemistry	A (275/300)	A* (560/600)
	Physics	A (294/300)	A* (574/600)
	German	B (159/200)	(not continued to A2)

Cambridge Natural Sciences

Candidate 8

KS4 GCSE Grades 4A*, 6 A, 1B

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A (242/300)	A* (520/600)
	Biology	B (232/300)	A (507/600)
	Chemistry	A (248/300)	A (515/600)
	Physics	C (205/300)	

Veterinary Medicine at Royal Veterinary College (also offers from 2 other Vet schools)

Candidate 9

KS4 GCSE Grades 8A*, 3A, 1B

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A	A (530/600)
	Further Maths	-	A* (505/600)
	Chemistry	A	A* (569/600)
	Biology	A	A* (575/600)
	Physics	A	A* (563/600)

Veterinary Medicine at Cambridge

Candidate 10

KS4 GCSE Grades 11A*

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Chemistry	A	A (518/600)
	Biology	A	A* (525/600)
	Geography	A	A (340/400)
	Maths	C	

Medicine at Cardiff

Candidate 11

KS4 GCSE Grades 8A*, 2A

KS 5		<u>AS Levels</u>	<u>A2 Levels</u>
	Maths	A	A (523/600)
	Chemistry	A	A* (549/600)
	Biology	A	A* (562/600)
	Physics	A	
	Crit Thinking	A	

Medicine at Nottingham

Oxbridge Application Progress Sheet

Name:

Oxford or Cambridge?

Subject:

College:

This completed sheet must be submitted to the Sixth Form Office on **Monday 5th September**. Submission of the document is a very important part of BWS Oxbridge applications. It is your opportunity to rehearse some of the points you will undoubtedly be making in your Personal Statement and will provide the Sixth Form Office with additional evidence of your suitability and commitment to Oxbridge study which in turn we may be able to reflect in the important references we provide to Oxford and Cambridge. In short, it is very much in your best interests to complete this fully!

1. **Commitment to academic excellence in your A Levels:** Use this section to detail academic achievements that show your suitability for Oxbridge. Include details of AS module performances which are 90% plus (provide appropriate details) and any other evidence about your academic performance that will strengthen your application.

2. **Your development of wider knowledge and understanding in your chosen subject:** Detail here the ways in which you are extending your knowledge and understanding in preparation for your application. Include details of books and articles you have read that have proved very influential in your thinking; details of additional workshops and other experiences you have attended that are directly connected to your preferred course of study. If you are studying for an online learning course (MOOC) or other form of additional qualification, also include details.



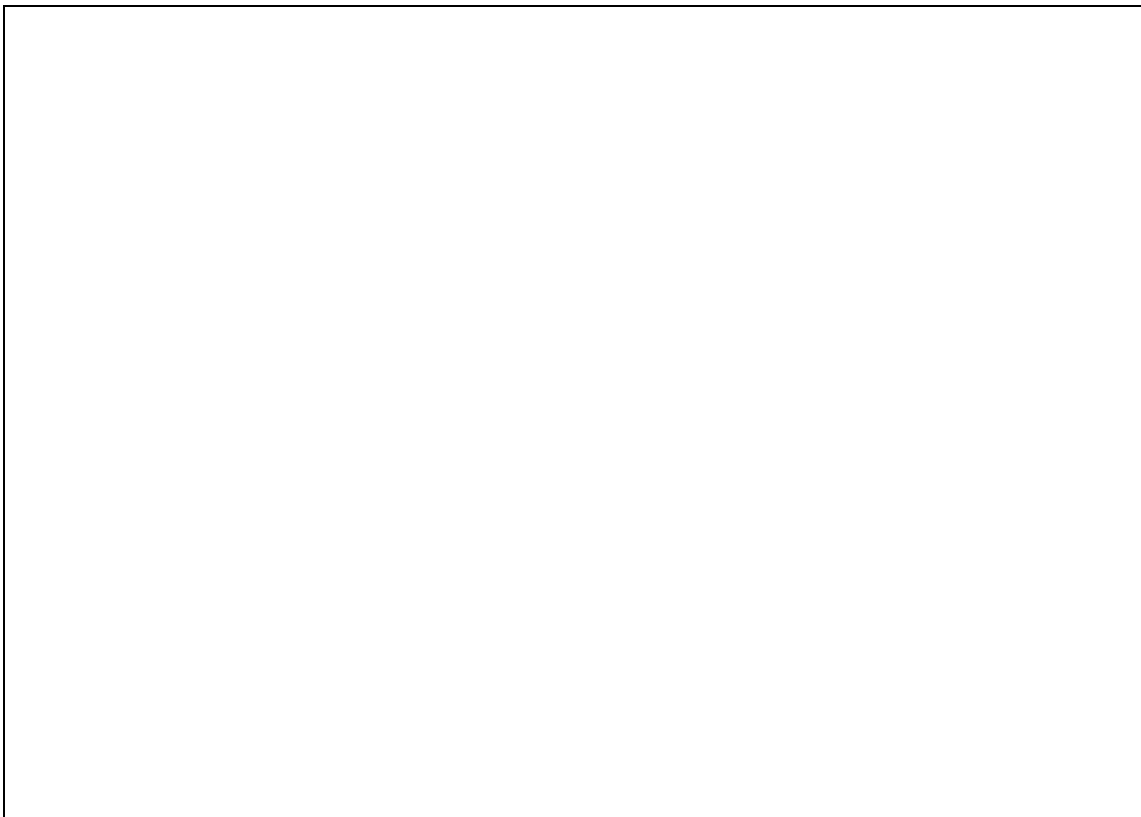
3. **Your contribution to Student Discussion Groups at BWS:** Provide a resume of your contribution to a discussion group. What have you learned? What are your plans for future sessions?



4. **Entrance requirements:** What are the specific entrance requirements for your chosen course? Is a pre-interview test required? If so, what does this involvement and what preparation have you undertaken?



5. **Why you feel best suited to Oxbridge Study:** Explain here why you are attracted to studying at Oxford/Cambridge? Why do you believe it would suit you?



6. **Your subject:** Explain why you are passionate about your chosen subject/course of study.



7. **Any other information that we should be aware of when writing your references**

