



Laying the Foundations for a Competitive HE Application

Choosing A Levels: some guidelines



If the choice of a post-A Level course or career is not yet clear it is best to choose a balance of A Levels that will be enjoyed.

However:

- Certain career and course options after A Level will require particular A Levels
 - The more competitive universities have identified some A Levels as not being a suitable preparation for some of their more academic courses **if more than one of them is taken.**
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Some university courses will require particular A Levels

- Generally, medical schools require Chemistry at A Level and often ask for Biology as well. Some *may* accept two science AS levels in place of one A Level science subject. One other science subject is also often required, for example Physics or Mathematics
 - Dental schools require Chemistry at A Level and often ask for Biology as well
 - Vet schools vary in their requirements but you will probably be expected to have Chemistry as an AS or A Level together with two from Biology Physics or Maths
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- ❑ Not surprisingly, many degree courses will require that the subject itself has been studied at A Level! eg Maths
 - ❑ There are some courses at university for which studying that subject at A Level is not necessary. Law and Psychology are examples of this



Applying to High Status Universities: The Russell Group



- ❑ The Russell Group is an association of 24 research intensive universities committed to maintaining the highest standards of research, education and knowledge transfer.
 - ❑ The Russell Group was formed in 1994 at the Russell Hotel in London.
 - ❑ Many of the most competitive and prestigious courses will be found at Russell Group universities
 - ❑ However, some competitive and prestigious individual courses might well be in other institutions
 - ❑ The Russell Group represents 12% of the higher education sector
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The Russell Group Universities

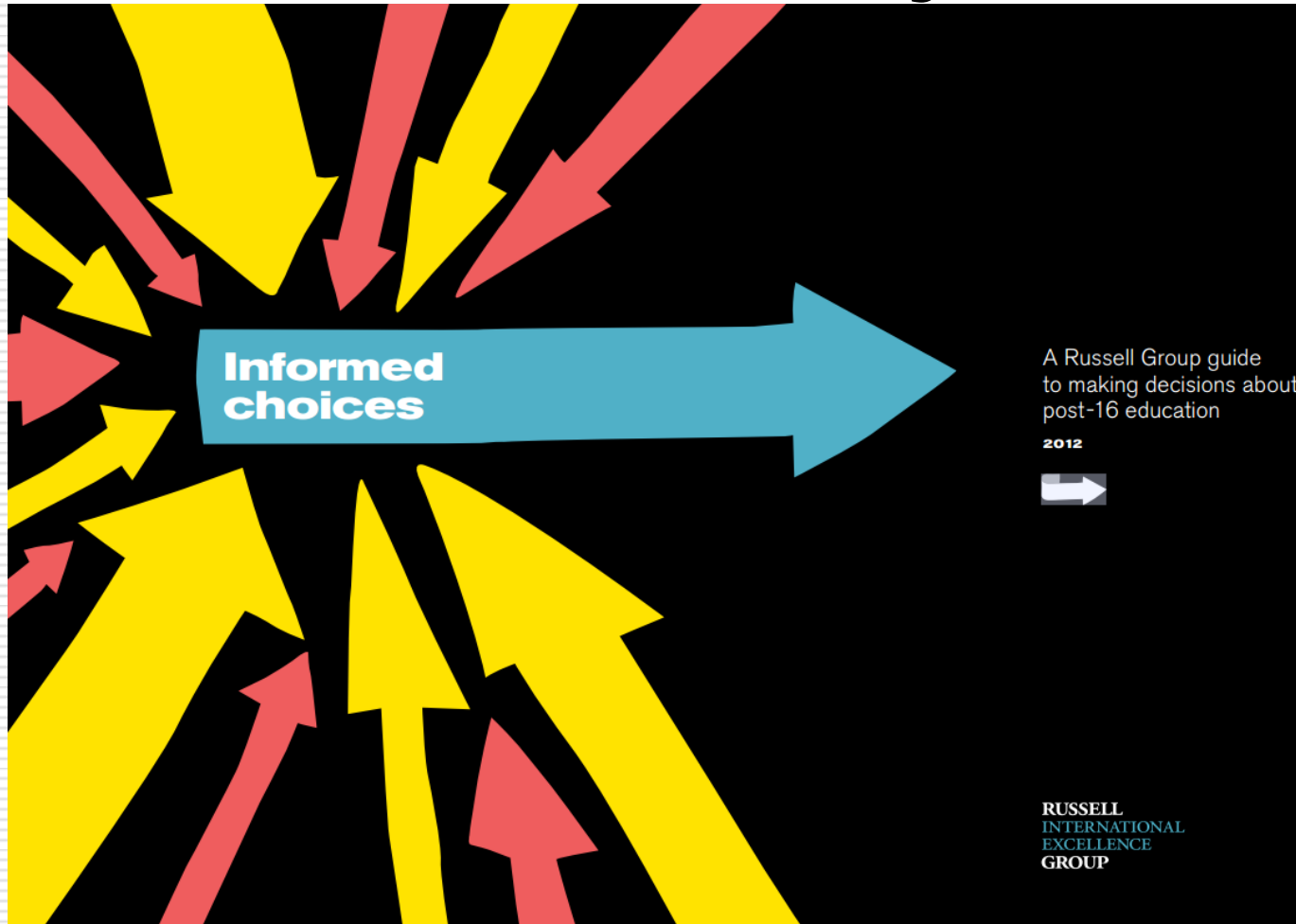
**RUSSELL
GROUP**

Birmingham
Bristol
Cambridge
Cardiff
Durham
Edinburgh
Exeter
Glasgow
Imperial College, London
King's College, London
Leeds
Liverpool



London School of Economics
Manchester
Newcastle
Nottingham
Queen Mary, London
Queen's University Belfast
Oxford
Sheffield
Southampton
University College, London
Warwick
York

What does the Russell Group say about A Level subject choice?



A Russell Group guide
to making decisions about
post-16 education

2012



RUSSELL
INTERNATIONAL
EXCELLENCE
GROUP

**An excellent
downloadable
PDF guide to
post-16
subject choice**

<http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices.aspx>

Informed Choices



Dr Wendy Piatt
Director General & CEO, The Russell Group

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynH9SmxEll8>

Russell Group Facilitating subjects: 'subjects that are required more often than others' at A level

Some degrees will be open to you whatever subjects you choose to study for your advanced level qualifications or at Higher Level (for IB or Scottish students). Just try to make sure that you stick to the **» five-point plan**. Also some courses will be happy with a subject at a lower level (for example, at AS-level instead of A-level or at Standard Level rather than Higher Level in the IB). This will be something to check before you apply.

Some popular degrees will **normally** be open to you without any specific subject background. These include:

Accountancy, Anthropology, Archaeology, Business Studies, History of Art, Law, Management Studies, Media Studies, Philosophy, Politics, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, Surveying.

ATTENTION!!

Although they may not be specified as required subjects, many successful applicants to the above courses do have advanced level qualifications in at least two of the facilitating subjects (see below). Some of these courses may still have a preference for some of the facilitating subjects and one or two universities may be more prescriptive in their subject requirements – check the Entry Profiles on [UCAS Course Search](#).

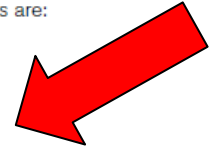
For a general guide as to the likely requirements for different degree courses, you can refer to **» subjects required for different degree courses**.

What subjects can give me the most options?

Many courses at university level build on knowledge which you will gain while still at school. Where this is the case, universities need to make sure that all the students they admit have prepared themselves in the best way to cope with their chosen course. For this reason, some university courses may require you to have studied a specific subject prior to entry, others may not. However, there are some subjects that are required more often than others. These subjects are sometimes referred to as **facilitating subjects**.

Subjects that can be viewed as 'facilitating' subjects are:

- Mathematics and Further Mathematics
- English (Literature)
- Physics
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Geography
- History
- Languages (Classical and Modern)



There are some advanced level subjects which provide suitable preparation for entry to university generally, but which we do not include within the facilitating subjects, because there are relatively few degree programmes where an advanced level qualification in these subjects would be a *requirement* for entry. Examples of such subjects include Economics, Religious Studies and Welsh. Advanced-level Welsh has separate curricula for first- and second-language Welsh speakers. The former develops literary and linguistic skills equivalent to those in advanced-level English; the latter develops skills equivalent to those in Modern Languages. Both routes are suitable preparation for university study in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

WARNING!

If you wish to study Music or Art at university, advanced level qualifications in Music or Art are usually required. Some Mathematics courses may require both Mathematics and Further Mathematics.

You will probably have many other subjects open to you at advanced level but, unlike the facilitating subjects listed above, they are unlikely to be required for any particular degree course and so choosing them doesn't increase your options at university.

'Facilitating' subjects

- Mathematics and Further Mathematics
 - English Literature
 - Physics
 - Biology
 - Chemistry
 - History
 - Geography
 - Languages (Classical and Modern)
-

Reasons to continue to study a subject at A Level:

- You have enjoyed and been good at the subject in the past
 - You need this subject to enter a particular career or course
 - You have not studied the subject before but you have looked into it and think it will suit your strengths
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Three further considerations:

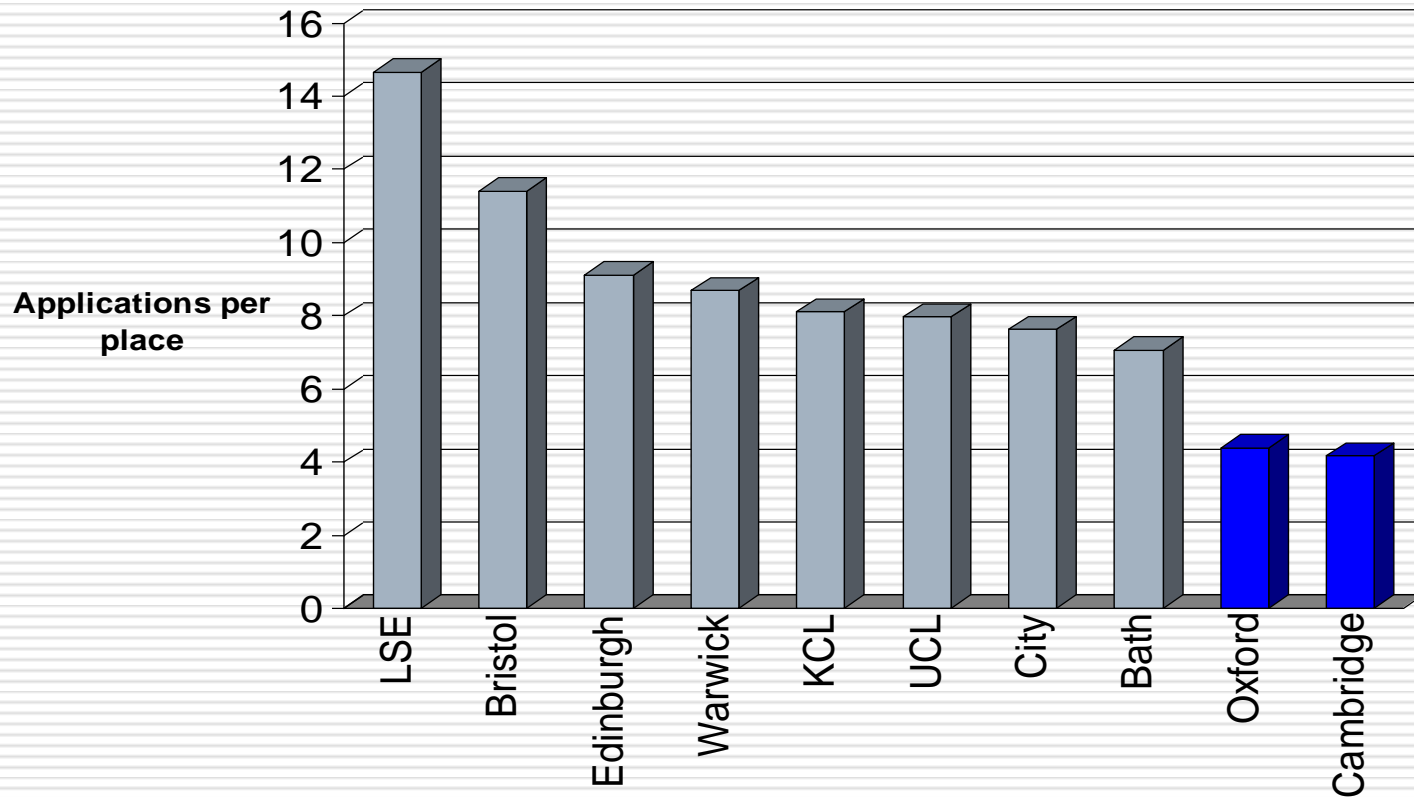
- ❑ Some subjects are distinctly more difficult at advanced level than at GCSE
 - ❑ Make sure you get your facts straight: there are many misconceptions about subjects required for courses and careers
 - ❑ Don't take an unformed risk. What is the new subject actually about?
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What Qualities are Russell Group Universities Looking for?

- ❑ Self motivation and commitment to the subject
- ❑ That you have done more than the syllabus demands
- ❑ That you can think critically and independently
- ❑ Ability to think conceptually and can engage with ideas
- ❑ 'Students who stick up for themselves stand out. What we are looking for is a student who can address issues in a logical fashion, reason from premises to conclusion. Even if a student is hesitant or shy, how well they think will still be evident.' Professor Thomas Noe, Oxford

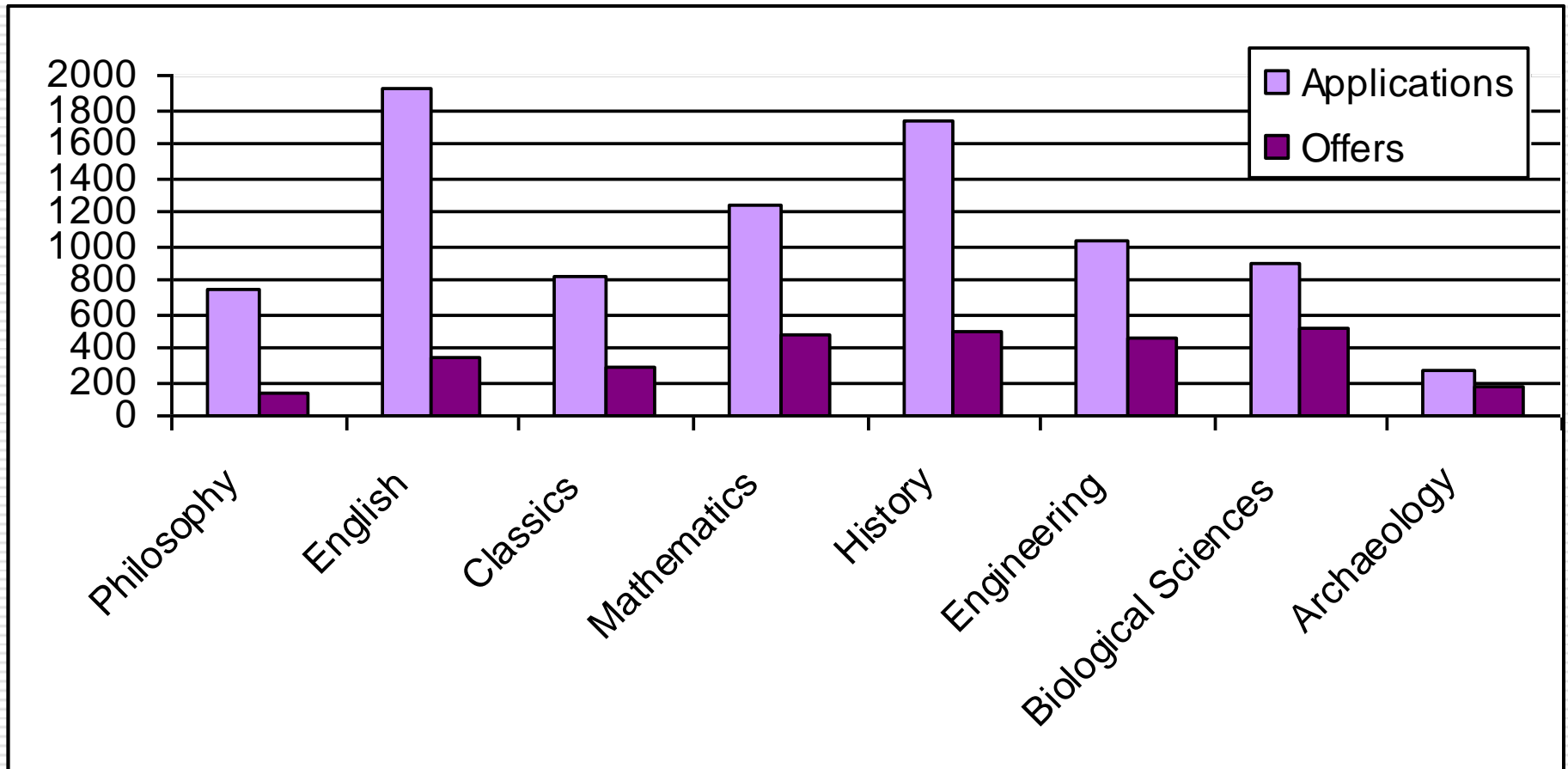


Prepare Well for the Competitive Challenge of High Status Universities



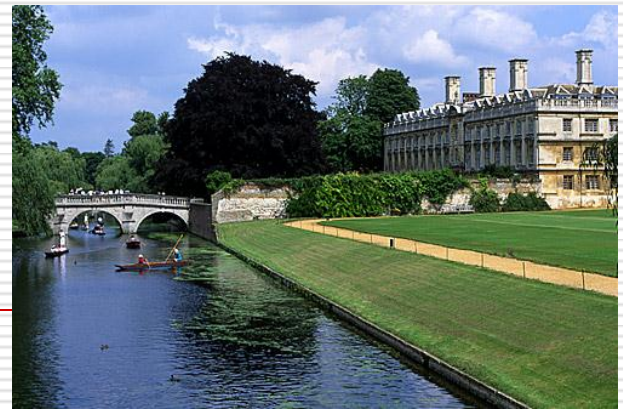
Source: Linda Hamer, LSE Access & Admissions Specialist Nov 2012

Chances of Receiving an Offer from Durham



Source: Embourg 2007, University of Durham

What kind of grades will be needed ?



- ❑ Challenging but achievable grades needed in most cases
 - ❑ Important to aim high but to be realistic about own potential in terms of course choice
 - ❑ Need to be clear about the level of competition for the most competitive Russell Group courses
 - ❑ Grades in themselves will not always be enough and other qualities may be required
 - ❑ Extensive work experience may be necessary in some cases
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Some examples



- ❑ English at Sheffield AAB
 - ❑ Chemistry at Durham A*AA
 - ❑ AAA-A*AA for Oxford with a few A*A*A requirements
 - ❑ A*AA and in some cases higher for Cambridge
 - ❑ At least AAA in most cases for Medicine
 - ❑ Good GCSEs still important and some course will have specific requirements eg some Medicine courses
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GCSE Profiles at Oxford (2010 entry)

Average A*	Course Name	Average A*	Course Name
7.81	Classics I	5.72	Music
7.03	Medicine	5.69	Engineering
6.15	Chemistry	5.69	Economics and Management
6.09	Biochemistry	5.61	English Language and Literature
6.08	Human Sciences	5.59	Mathematics
6.04	Biological Sciences	5.06	Experimental Psychology
5.94	History	5.03	Ancient and Modern History
5.91	Philosophy, Politics and Economics	5.01	History of Art
5.87	Earth Sciences	4.93	Theology
5.83	Geography	4.82	Law
5.79	Physics	4.82	Archaeology and Anthropology
5.79	Biomedical Engineering	4.79	Classics II
5.77	Materials Science	4.43	Computer Science



A very strong examination record



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE


- We seek students whose academic record places them in approximately the **top 3%** of the ability range
- Most – though by no means all – successful Cambridge applicants have an AS UMS average (across their best or most relevant three subjects) of comfortably **above 90%**
- The mean AS average of students receiving offers from a range of Cambridge Colleges in 2010/11 was **94-96%**
- There is no minimum required number of A*s at GCSE, though most successful applicants achieved A* in most of their GCSEs

Medicine: Some Pointers

- ❑ At least, 10-13 applicants for every place. Close to 40% now are filled by graduates
 - ❑ Academic ability necessary but not sufficient
 - ❑ Also need ability to be sensitive and caring towards others.
 - ❑ Qualities: integrity, confidentiality, caring, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and a spirit of enquiry. Give **evidence** of these in Personal Statement and interview
 - ❑ High grades: AAA, A*AA Oxbridge
 - ❑ Extensive work experience in hospitals, with GPs and in voluntary caring essential
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UCAS Medical Applications data 2011

Applicants	22858	
Receive offer	8486	37% of applicants
No offer	14372	63% of applicants
One offer	4907	21%
Two offers	2396	10%
Three offers	956	4%
Four offers	227	1%



Applicants with at least one application for Medicine

	% of applicants	Received at least one offer (37.1%)
1 choice	5.8	0.8
2 choices	6.7	1.7
3 choices	18.1	7.2
4 choices	69.3	27.5

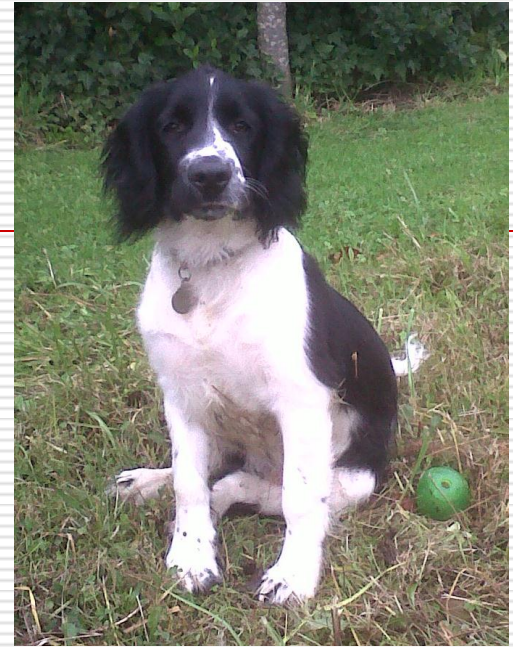
Overall ratio applicants to offers: 2.7

Very important to choose 4 schools you want to go to

Veterinary Science

Requirements will vary but typically:

- ❑ GCSE: mainly As and A*s
- ❑ A LEVEL AAAA-AAB Biology, Chemistry and another
- ❑ Prelim year at Bristol and Nottingham for non-scientists
- ❑ Extensive work experience (Bristol and RVC 2-6 weeks, 10 weeks for Liverpool!) in a variety of settings: work with small and large animals and in different types of practice



Dentistry

- ❑ One of most popular subjects
- ❑ Only 16 dental schools
- ❑ Around 12,000 applicants for 1,200 places
- ❑ Average of 10 applicants for each place
- ❑ Need work experience with dentists and in voluntary setting





Entry Requirements:

- ❑ Good GCSE scores: mainly As and A*s
 - ❑ 3 full A levels at least AAB (probably AAA, A*AA for Cambridge) including As in Biology and Chemistry
 - ❑ UKCAT selection test for most dental schools
 - ❑ Pre-dental course for those without science A levels
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What support can Bay House Sixth Form provide?



A Proven Record of HE Success

- 40% achieved ABB or higher
 - 90% gained places at their first choice university
 - 38% gained places at Russell Group universities (set against 8% national average)
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Harry

- **Previous School - Bay House**

 - Achievements:
 - A2 English Language – A*
 - A2 Maths – A*
 - A2 Physics – A
 - AS Critical Thinking – A
 - EPQ - A

 - **Currently studying Law at the University of Cambridge**
-

Victoria

- ❑ **Previous School - Bay House**
 - ❑ Achievements:
 - ❑ A2 Biology – A*
 - ❑ A2 Chemistry – A
 - ❑ A2 Physical Education – A
 - ❑ A2 Psychology – A
 - ❑ **Currently studying Biological Sciences at the University of Oxford**
-

James

- **Previous School - Crofton**

- Achievements:

- A2 Maths – A*
- A2 Chemistry – A
- A2 Further Maths – A
- A2 Physics – A

- **Currently studying Physics at the University of Oxford**

Andrew

- ❑ **Previous School - Crofton**
 - ❑ Achievements:
 - ❑ A2 Maths – A*
 - ❑ A2 Further Maths – A
 - ❑ A2 Physics – A
 - ❑ A2 Philosophy – A
 - ❑ EPQ - A
 - ❑ **Currently studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Oxford**
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Rebecca

- **Previous School - Wykeham House**
 - Achievements:
 - A2 History – A*
 - A2 English Literature – A
 - A2 Government & Politics – A
 - A2 Psychology – A
 - EPQ – A*
 - **Currently studying English Language & Literature at the University of Oxford**
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Matthew

- ❑ **Previous School – Bay House**
 - ❑ Achievements:
 - ❑ A2 History – A*
 - ❑ A2 Government & Politics – A*
 - ❑ A2 Geography – A
 - ❑ AS Psychology – A
 - ❑ **Currently studying History at the University of Cambridge**
-

Jack

- **Previous School – Crofton**

- Achievements:

- A2 Further Maths – A*

- A2 Maths – A*

- A2 Physics – A*

- A2 Biology – A

- **Currently studying Physics at the University of Oxford**

Sophie

□ **Previous School – Crofton**

□ Achievements:

□ A2 Maths – A*

□ A2 Biology – A

□ A2 Chemistry – A

□ AS Geography - B

□ EPQ - A

□ **Currently studying Medicine at the University of Southampton**

Eloise

- ❑ **Previous School – Bay House**

 - ❑ Achievements:
 - ❑ A2 English Literature – A
 - ❑ A2 History – A
 - ❑ A2 Maths – A
 - ❑ A2 Spanish - A
 - ❑ EPQ - A

 - ❑ **Currently studying Law at the University of Warwick**
-

Fred

- **Previous School – Crofton**

- Achievements:

- A2 Biology – A
- A2 Maths – A
- A2 Chemistry – A
- AS Physics – A

- **Currently studying Medicine at King's College London**

We offer a structured programme of preparation for HE

- ❑ Series of assemblies looking at choices, institutions, grades
- ❑ Visit to UCAS Fair in Portsmouth
- ❑ Input from and visits to universities
- ❑ An Oxbridge Application Programme
- ❑ Assistance with external admission tests, including BMAT





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- ❑ The Extended Project Qualification
 - ❑ Guidance from an experienced team of teachers and tutors
 - ❑ Substantial help with personal statements
 - ❑ Mock interview practice
 - ❑ Extra-curricular opportunities
 - ❑ Parent Information Evenings
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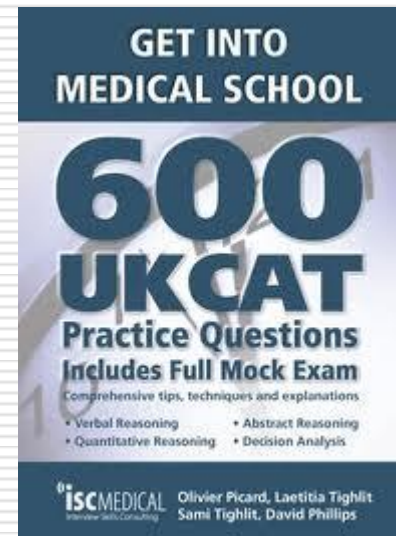
Oxbridge Application Programme

- ❑ Enrichment seminars in Humanities and Science
- ❑ Oxbridge Student Conference
- ❑ Visits to Oxbridge
- ❑ Practice interviews
- ❑ Staff mentors
- ❑ Alumni links



Medical Application Programme

- ❑ UKCAT/BMAT preparatory sessions – tests verbal, quantitative and abstract reasoning plus decision analysis. Tests for appropriate professional attitude, mental abilities and problem solving skills necessary for Medicine/Dentistry
- ❑ Staff mentors
- ❑ Practice interviews
- ❑ Alumni links in Medical schools



EPQ: Extended Project Qualification

- ❑ Extends abilities beyond A Level specification
- ❑ Carries extra UCAS points - half an A Level
- ❑ Self-directed project, rather like a dissertation, which encourages critical, reflective and independent learners
- ❑ Develops decision making, problem solving and presentation skills
- ❑ Increases motivation as students study a topic of personal interest



Extra-curricular Opportunities

- Volunteering
- Leadership
- Donate-a-Day
- Debating
- Subject Ambassadors
- National Citizen Service
- Sport
- Music, Drama
- Fundraising
- Duke of Edinburgh Award



Other Opportunities



- ❑ Study Days at University of Oxford
- ❑ Teatime lectures and Study Days at University of Southampton
- ❑ Access to Southampton (A2S) – supporting first generation prospective university students
- ❑ Sutton Trust – residential Summer School at competitive universities, and to the United States
- ❑ Pathways to Law at University of Southampton
- ❑ Student research team working with University of Southampton

