

# Applying to Oxford and Cambridge



Nancy Braithwaite  
Academic Director, Pembroke College, Oxford  
Richard Partington  
Senior Tutor, Churchill College, Cambridge

# What distinguishes Oxford and Cambridge?

- Collegiate
  - Supervisions or tutorials: weekly teaching in very small groups
  - Your home in Oxford or Cambridge
  - Outstanding student support, including financial support
- Innovative and challenging courses, inspired by cutting-edge research
- Superb academic facilities
- Excellent career opportunities



# What characteristics do we look for in our students?

- Genuine subject interest
- Good 'fit' between your interest and aptitude, and your course
- Excellent academic track record: the average grade-profile of entrants (2.5 A\*s at A Level) far exceeds standard offers
- Capacity for hard work (~45 hours per week)
- Core knowledge and technical fluency
- Ability to learn independently, with focus and determination
- Natural curiosity
- Vocational commitment (where appropriate)

# Key information in selection

- Assessment is holistic within an academic context
  - Results and predicted grades in public exams
    - Appropriately contextualised
    - A Level or equivalent is likely to be the final arbiter
    - GCSEs: a factor, but not a major one
  - UCAS reference
  - UCAS personal statement
  - Admissions test results
  - Submitted written work
  - Interview performance

# UCAS personal statement

- Assessed in its own right
- A potential starting-point for some interview questions
- Write with integrity
- Cover
  - Course interest
  - Relevant subjects you have studied
  - Super-curricular exploration – which is vital to showing interest in your subject, and to building knowledge and understanding
- Extra-curricular activities do **not** figure in our considerations

# Cambridge admissions assessments

- Subject-based aptitude tests
- Pre-interview admissions assessments
  - Sat in school/college in late October/early November
  - Pre-register via school/college by 1 October (BMAT) or 15 October (others)
- At-interview admissions assessments
  - Sat at time of interview
- Know the format and practise against the clock
- Used holistically alongside other indicators for both shortlisting for interview and offers of places

# Oxford admissions tests

- Key information

- [www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests?wssl=1](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests?wssl=1)

- Sat in school/college in late October/early November (except LNAT)
- Pre-register via school/college by 1 October (BMAT), 5 October (LNAT) or 15 October (all other admissions tests)
- Know the format and practise against the clock
- Used principally for shortlisting for interview

# Interviews: nature and format

- Interactive tests of core knowledge, aptitude and interest – calling them ‘interviews’ is arguably misleading
- Typically 2-4 interviews of 20-30 minutes each
- Conducted by subject specialists, and focused on your subject
- Problem-solving scenarios, discussion and technical working
- Focused and challenging academic questions
- Prompting from, and questions to, interviewers
- **We have no hidden agenda and ask no trick questions**

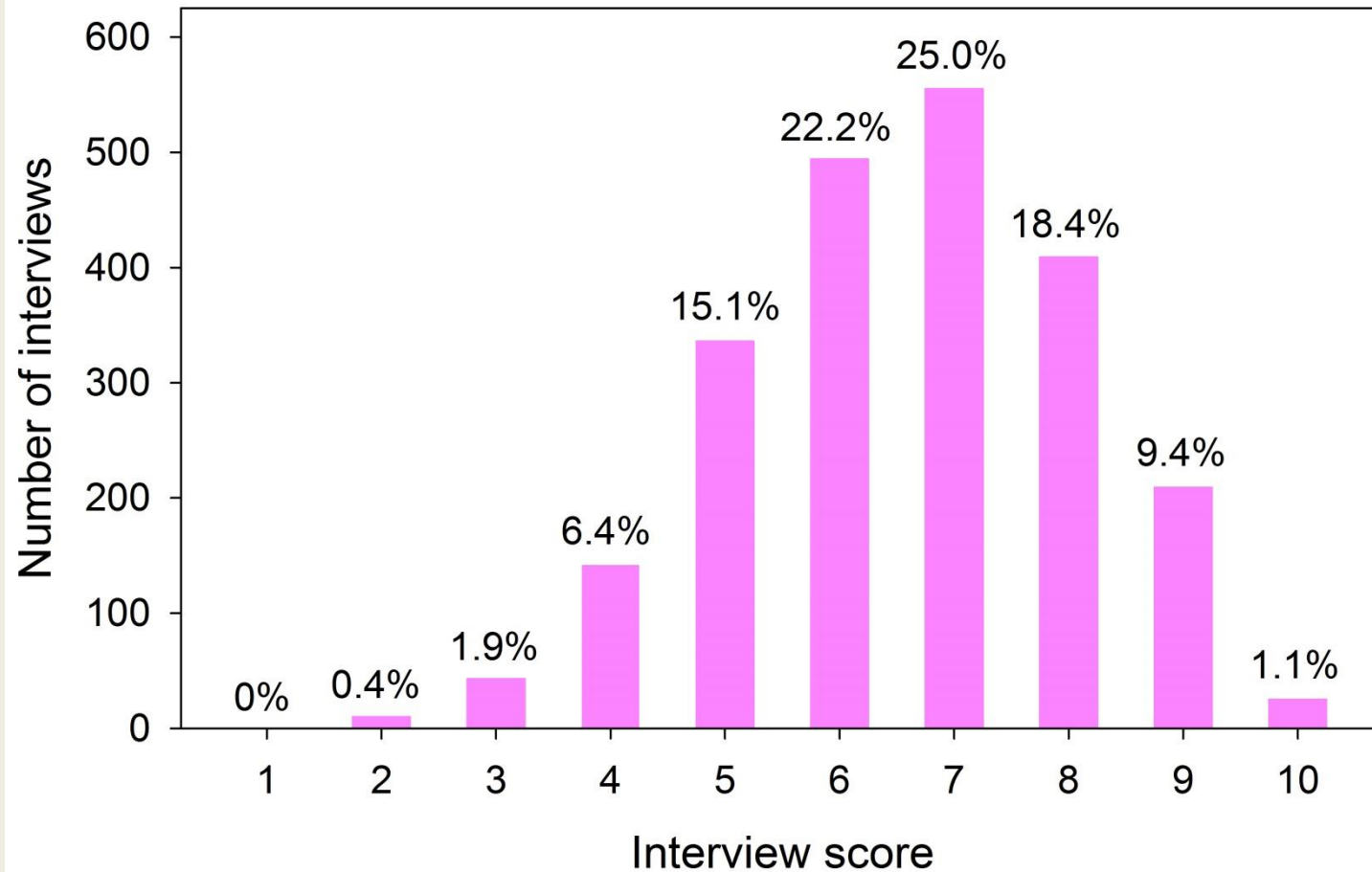


# Interviews: what do we talk about?

- Academic content covered in school or college
- Reading and other super-curricular exploration
- Questions emerging from your UCAS personal statement
- Submitted written work
- Prompt material



# Interviews: most applicants do well



# Possible pitfalls

- Wrong subject
- Track-record in exams or exam predictions raise questions
- Poor organisation
- Lack of super-curricular exploration – often first evidenced by a thin UCAS personal statement
- At interview:
  - Core subject knowledge insecure
  - Little wider subject knowledge
  - Insufficient analytical ability, synoptic ability or clarity of thought
  - Unwillingness to re-think ideas in the face of contrary evidence

# Summary: what makes a difference?

- Hard work and hard thought
  - Right subject
  - Good GCSEs, given your school context, and excellent predictions and results at A-Level or equivalent
  - Sustained wider reading and analytical thinking
  - Practise for admissions tests
  - Revision in advance of interview

Questions ?

