Classical Archaeology and Ancient History Admissions Feedback 2019-20

This year the University of Oxford had a high number of applicants for Classical Archaeology and Ancient History. Many of the candidates who applied made very good applications and, as every year, many difficult decisions had to be made.

Throughout the process, contextual data for UK candidates, including school performance and postcode data, were used when assessing applications. You can find more information about contextual data on the Oxford University website here.

Unfortunately, not every applicant could be interviewed. Decisions about which candidates to shortlist for interview were based on exam results and predictions, the UCAS academic reference and personal statement, and submitted written work.

UCAS forms were graded by Oxford Classical Archaeology and Ancient History tutors based on the personal statement and reference.

Written work was marked by Oxford Classical Archaeology and Ancient History tutors based on the following criteria: signs of good basic knowledge, powers of analysis, powers of expression, ability to construct a coherent train of thought, and to shape an argument. The tutors marking the written work take the context it was written in into consideration; different standards of content and presentation are expected from a piece of highly prepared coursework and from a piece written for homework with a short deadline.

Given the number of shortlisted applicants and their uneven distribution between colleges, a small number of shortlisted candidates are reallocated from oversubscribed colleges to colleges with a lower ratio of candidates to places. All shortlisted candidates were invited for interviews in Oxford. After first-college interviews, around 40 additional interviews were arranged at second and sometimes third colleges, to give each candidate the best chance of receiving a place.

Interviews aimed primarily to assess the candidate’s potential for independent thinking, ability to follow an argument, skill in communication, and adaptability for tutorial teaching. It is not a test of knowledge in isolation from context; nor is it a test of verbal facility or social charm. Interviewers were looking for evidence of ability to respond in a thoughtful way to unpredictable questions and ideas. They were also looking for evidence that the candidate’s interest goes beyond schoolwork, and that they are able to deploy their knowledge in ways that show initiative. For more details visit: https://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/admissions-criteria-classical-archaeology-ancient-history#collapse281301.

The competition for places was very high this year. 93% of applicants were interviewed and only 36% of applicants were made offers.