Fine Art Admissions Feedback 2019-20

This year the University of Oxford had a high number of applicants for Fine Art. 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.

As the undergraduate Fine Art course is taught entirely within The Ruskin School of Art, shortlisting and interviews take place within the School (department). Subject to colleges’ final approval, The Ruskin makes decisions about offers.

Unfortunately, not every applicant can be interviewed. Decisions about which candidates to shortlist were based on candidates’ UCAS submissions and portfolio submissions.

Portfolios were viewed and evaluated by tutors at The Ruskin and the candidates’ preferred (or allocated) college. Tutors were searching for highly motivated activity, and for a breadth of engagement, a sense of purpose and a strength of opinion in the way the portfolio was edited. They expected a high degree of competence in the use of specific media, but this was not in itself sufficient. The portfolios of candidates called for interview tended to exhibit curiosity and creativity beyond the expectations of the A Level or equivalent, and an awareness of contemporary art practice. It was important for the Fine Art tutors to be able to discover a sense of the temperament underlying the work, and to sense the deeper interests that inform the portfolio. They were not interested in finding a particular formula or a specific style, but in signs of energy, ambition, critical reflection and creativity. More information on the portfolio can be found at: https://www.rsa.ox.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/submitting-a-portfolio.

All shortlisted candidates were invited for interviews in Oxford. Interviews took place at The Ruskin and were conducted by a small group of tutors. Some colleges conducted additional interviews. Whilst in Oxford, all interview candidates undertook a Practical Test in the Drawing Studio at The Ruskin. This gave candidates the chance to demonstrate their ability and inventiveness.

Interviews at The Ruskin presented candidates with an opportunity to tell tutors about themselves and the ideas that inform their work. Candidates were invited to bring some examples of their recent work to their interview and this often served as the basis and as a springboard for discussion. Candidates were encouraged to talk about their work and interests in the interview and to discuss contemporary art, including books recently read and exhibitions recently visited.

The Practical Test gave candidates the chance to demonstrate their ability and inventiveness. More information can be found at: https://www.rsa.ox.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying-to-study-for-a-bfa.

82% of applicants were female and 18% of applicants were male. 71% of offers were to female candidates and 29% of offers were to male candidates. 57% of the UK applicants offered a place had commenced a Foundation course in Fine Art (32% of applicants had commenced such a course). 78% of UK candidates offered places were from UK state schools and 22% were from independent schools.
The competition for places was very high this year. Only around 20% of applicants were invited for interview and only around 10% of applicants were given places.