History Admissions Feedback 2019-20

This year the University of Oxford had a high number of applicants for History, History and Politics, and Ancient and Modern 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 were based on contextually GCSE scores (where available) and the HAT (History Aptitude Tests), with each component given an equal weighting (50:50).

The below graph illustrates the distribution of HAT scores among applicants:

Given the number of shortlisted applicants and their uneven distribution between colleges, a 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, additional interviews were arranged at second and sometimes third colleges, to give the strongest candidates the best chance of receiving a place.

Following shortlisting, written work was marked by History tutors and was used as a prompt in some interviews. Written work is assessed against the History selection criteria which is as follows: intellectual curiosity, conceptual clarity, flexibility (the capacity to engage with alternative perspectives and/or new information), accuracy and attention to detail, critical engagement, capacity for hard work, enthusiasm for History, and evidence of historical imagination and understanding, in particular, the ability to speculate and compare, alongside the possession of appropriate historical knowledge and the capacity to deploy it. For more information about the selection criteria and written work visit: https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/how-apply#collapse1-0.

Pre-interview assessments of shortlisted candidates were based on contextually GCSEs, the HAT, and History written work, with the following weighting: contextualised GCSEs: 40%, HAT: 40%, and written work: 20%.
Interviews aimed to assess candidate’s intellectual potential. They aimed to test candidates’ ability to think historically, their intellectual flexibility, conceptual skills, and the precision of their thinking. As with written work, interviews were assessed against the History selection criteria.

Post-interview, applications are assessed on the basis of contextualised GCSEs, the HAT, written work, and interview performance. The weighting was as follows: contextualised GCSEs: 30%, HAT: 30%, History written work: 10%, interviews: 30% (for History and Politics and Ancient and Modern History, equal weighting is given to the History interview performance and the Politics or Ancient History interview performance, i.e. both are weighted as 15%).

The competition for places was very high this year. Only 60% of applicants were invited for interviews and only 21% of applicants were offered a place.