Modern Languages, including Joint Schools Admissions Feedback 2019-20

This year the University of Oxford had a high number of applicants for Modern Languages, including Joint Schools. 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 exam results and predictions, the UCAS academic reference and personal statement, submitted written work, and MLAT (Modern Languages Admissions Test) results. Applications were assessed according to the published selection criteria: https://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/faqs#faq-12. Candidates who were assessed as not meeting the selection criteria on the basis of these factors were not usually invited for interview.

Written work was marked by Oxford tutors in the languages candidates applied for based on the following criteria: relevance to the question or topic; coherence of argument; clear and logical structure; precision and clarity of writing; in the case of written work in the language(s), ability to use correctly a range of grammatical structures and vocabulary; and in the case of written work in English, a good command of the English language.

Depending on the language(s) candidates apply for, they sit different sections of the MLAT. For example, those applying for Spanish and Beginners’ Italian would sit the Spanish Test and Language Aptitude Test (LAT). Each test lasts half an hour. Specific language tests are designed to test knowledge of basic structures of the foreign language and are not primarily a test of vocabulary. More information can be found here: https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests/mlat.

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.

Interviews are intended primarily to assess candidates’ potential for future development and suitability for an intensive, tutorially-based teaching system. Knowledge of the literature of the language(s) is not being assessed, but assessors will look for evidence of an aptitude for literary study. In some cases, candidates may be given a short passage (either in the language or in English) to prepare before the interview. Successful candidates will take the opportunity to present a reading of the passage in an argued, clear, critical, and articulate way; they will equally be ready to listen to ideas put to them and to assess their relevance. There may be an oral component to the interview, designed to test the correctness and fluency with which the candidate can speak the language (this will not be the case for candidates who apply to study a language as a beginner).

All candidates interviewing in Oxford received at least two interviews, typically including an interview for each of the languages they were applying to study. Interviews were assessed on the basis of the selection criteria linked above.
The competition for places was very high this year. 90% of candidates were interviewed and only 37% of applicants were offered places.