This year the University of Oxford had a high number of applicants for Physics. 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 can be interviewed. The purpose of shortlisting for interview is to identify those applicants who are most likely to succeed in the rest of the selection process and give interviewers time to consider each shortlisted candidate carefully. Decisions about which candidates to shortlist were based on contextualised GCSEs and PAT (Physics Aptitude Test) results. These decisions were made based on the published admissions criteria (https://www2.physics.ox.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduates/applications/admissions-procedures-for-physics). Only 27% of Physics applicants were shortlisted for interview.

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. The aim of reallocation is to even out competition for places across the University. All shortlisted candidates were invited for interviews in Oxford. For those who came to interviews in Oxford, interviews were conducted at two colleges. This gives the strongest candidates the best chance of receiving a place.

The Physics Aptitude Test (PAT) has been run for several years, and it is known to be a good predictor of future performance at Oxford. The test is set to a defined syllabus and the content is checked by school teachers to ensure that the level is appropriate. Maths and physics elements are mixed together into a single two-hour paper. Further details, including the admissions criteria and sample papers can be found on the Oxford Physics Admissions website at: https://www2.physics.ox.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduates/applications/physics-aptitude-test-pat.

The below graph illustrates shortlisting and offer decisions by PAT scores:

Interviews are academic and subject-focussed in nature. The applicant’s performance in each interview was judged according to the admissions criteria: https://www2.physics.ox.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduates/applications/admissions-procedures-for-physics. Offer decisions were based
on an assessment of candidates’ PAT score, contextualised GCSE performance, the information on the UCAS form, and interview performance. Candidates were compared centrally against all candidates applying for Physics.

The competition for places was very high this year. Only 27% of applicants were invited for interviews and only 11% of applicants were offered a place.