

Physics Admissions 2026 – a guide for teachers

Oxford physics admissions has two underlying principles: that admissions should be equitable for all young people regardless of where they apply from and that admissions should be equitable for all young people regardless of where they apply to.

There is no magic formula for a successful application to Oxford Physics. Our applicants come from a vast range of backgrounds all around the world and have had a correspondingly wide range of opportunities and so we cannot, and do not, use a checklist approach to evaluate applications. Instead, we are looking for students who have made the most of the opportunities which are available to them and have fully engaged with the activities which they have participated in. We do not select based upon participation in opportunities which are not available to all students. In deciding which applicants to invite to interview and, ultimately, to make offers to, we take into consideration every element of an application including scores on admissions tests, performance in interviews, information from the UCAS form, teacher references and personal statements.

We operate a centralised departmental and college-based admissions system to ensure that applicants are not advantaged or disadvantaged by choosing a particular college or submitting an open application in any given admissions cycle. As such college “choice” is only ever college “preference”.

To apply for a place on an undergraduate course in the Oxford Physics department:

- All applicants must submit a UCAS form and sit an admissions test (in 2026 this will be, in common with Imperial and Cambridge, the ESAT)
- Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interviews
- Successful applicants will be made an offer

UCAS form

Applicants can only apply to one course at Oxford or Cambridge universities in an application cycle.

All courses at Oxford and Cambridge universities (in addition to medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine) share the early UCAS deadline of October 15th.

Applicants can choose between two physics courses: MPhys (UCAS code F303) or MPhysPhil (UCAS code VF53)

Applicants can give a college preference if they wish or can make an open application (an application where a college preference is not given).

In addition to the basics, UCAS forms ask applicants to answer three questions, which form a personal statement, and to provide a reference from their school. All universities applied to receive these alongside school information such as GCSE grades and demographic information such as postcode.

The admissions test

From 2026 Oxford Physics and Oxford Engineering (including physics and philosophy) will use the ESAT test administered by University Admissions Tests UK.

Physics applicants will be required to sit maths 1, physics and maths 2.

Test details, including information on bursaries and registration can be found at <https://esat-tmua.ac.uk/about-the-tests/esat-test/>

We will receive scores for each module of ESAT sat by applicants and will use this information, alongside the UCAS form, to decide which applicants we invite to interview. As it is the first year in which we are using ESAT scores, we will be taking even more time and care to look at applications and we recommend making sure that every element of it is as good as it can be, including the UCAS questions.

Interviews

Shortlisted applicants are invited to interview. All of our interviews are online and typically take place during school hours in early December. We interview 2 to 3 applicants per place which equates to roughly 30% of applicants in any given year.

Applicants typically have 2 or 3 interviews at two colleges. One of these colleges is usually the applicant's first preference (if they expressed a preference on their UCAS form). However, if colleges receive a particularly high number of applicants per place, applicants will be allocated to another college. Colleges are not informed of college choice.

Interviews are conducted by physics tutors and interview performance is used as part of the information which determines who is offered a place.

Interviews are almost exclusively based on maths and physics problem solving and may be maths only, physics only or a mixture of the two depending on the preference of the interviewing tutors. Applicants are expected to be able to apply their knowledge of maths and physics to unfamiliar contexts. The level of these interviews is high and we recommend that students are prepared to answer questions above the level of the ESAT.

Interviews are typically 25-30 minutes long and will involve one applicant and two or three tutors.

Physics and philosophy applicants will have additional interviews for philosophy.

General information

Our entrance requirements for students taking A-levels are A*AA with the A* in Physics, Maths or Further Maths. The required subjects are physics and maths, with further maths highly useful but not compulsory.

Information about the structure of our undergraduate courses can be found at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/course-listing/physics>

We offer a completely free Preparing for Oxford Physics course and accompanying programme of targeted support. This programme typically begins in June and runs through to early December. Details for this course and links for registration can be found at on our university website at <https://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/engage/schools/secondary-schools/preparing-oxford-physics>

