



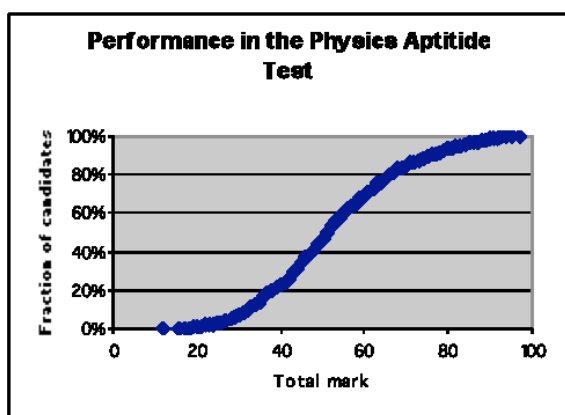
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Report on Physics Aptitude Test 2008

Oxford Physics receives a large number of applications for places on both the Physics and Physics and Philosophy courses. In 2008 there were a total of 853 applicants contesting around 188 places, more than 4.5 applicants per place. We are, therefore, using a short-listing process, using the results of our Physics Aptitude Test to guide us in reducing the number of applicants to around 2.5 per place.

These tests have been piloted for several years, and are known to be good predictors of future performance at Oxford; in particular they are better predictors than GCSE results. The tests are set to a defined syllabus and the contents are checked by school teachers to ensure that they are set at an appropriate level. Further details including sample papers can be found on the Oxford Physics Admissions website www.physics.ox.ac.uk/admissions/. This year, the separate maths and physics tests were combined into a single two hour maths/physics test.

We are extremely grateful to all the schools and test centres for agreeing to host candidates and for bearing with us through inevitable hitches. The great majority of tests went smoothly, and in the small number of cases where there were difficulties we have made due allowance in interpreting marks. We have also taken note of medical certificates and letters drawing attention to grave events in applicants' personal lives. We are grateful for the advice we have received from schools on making the administration of these tests simpler, and expect to continue to make minor changes reflecting this advice in subsequent years.



Our primary short-listing criterion is the total mark achieved on the tests, which ranged from 12 to 97, with a mean mark of 53 and a standard deviation of 16. More details are shown in the graph which plots the cumulative rank of candidates scoring a certain mark. All applicants scoring 52 and above were then short-listed. A small number of applicants below this cut-off whose application forms showed other evidence of excellence were added to give a final short-list of around 460 candidates who will be invited to Oxford for

interview (candidates from outside Europe will normally be interviewed by telephone).

A key element of the Oxford Admissions process is that the chance of admission should not depend on the choice of college to apply through. Our short-listing is, therefore, followed by a reallocation process, in which candidates are transferred from colleges with large numbers of candidates to colleges with a smaller number of candidates, so as to ensure that the number of candidates per place is approximately constant across the collegiate university. This year around 60 candidates were reallocated. Reallocation has been practised by the University for many years, making it easier for strong candidates to obtain a place at Oxford even if it is not at their first choice college.