Summary of the Admissions Process for Computer Science, Mathematics & Computer Science and Computer Science & Philosophy Oxford University, 2016–17

Summary

In all 811 applications were received in 2016 for Computer Science and joint degrees. This represents an increase of about 18% compared with last year, with a 35% increase in applications for Mathematics & Computer Science. Of these, 265 (33%) were short-listed. In all 92 offers (including open offers) were made (compared to 83 last year).

Broken down, by degree subject, the applications and offers are as follows:

- Computer Science: 424 applications; 108 short-listed; 36 offers;

- Mathematics & Computer Science: 306 applications; 123 short-listed; 42 offers;

- Computer Science & Philosophy: 81 applications; 34 short-listed; 14 offers.

Application numbers have increased by 173% in the last four years, but the number of places has increased by only 35%. As a result, many excellent, worthy candidates were not given a place.

Short-listing

In light of the competition for places, the purpose of short-listing is to identify the candidates most likely to succeed at Oxford. The number of short-listed candidates is restricted to about three per place, in order to ensure that all short-listed candidates receive careful consideration during the December interview window.

Short-listing is performed in accordance with the stated admissions criteria (http://www.cs.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/why_oxford/formal_admissions_criteria.html).

All applicants are expected to sit the Mathematics Admissions Test (MAT) prior to short-listing, or seek permission in exceptional circumstances to be exempted from the test. The test includes questions designed to assess aptitude for Computer Science. The distribution of test papers and return

of test scripts was undertaken by ATS. The test date was 2nd November. Details of the test, and several past and specimen papers, can be found at `http://www.cs.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/how_to_apply/MAT_test.html`.

As guidance, the Admissions Coordinator advises college tutors of two thresholds, based on a validated weighted combination of the MAT score and GCSE A* scores (where applicable). By default, all candidates above the higher threshold are short-listed, and all candidates below the lower threshold are rejected, unless there are strong reasons to do otherwise. College tutors carefully consider candidates between the two thresholds, and about half are short-listed.

In making decisions, tutors take into account all information they know about candidates, including their score from the MAT, all aspects of their UCAS form, and any further relevant contextual information, such as educational background. The Admissions Coordinator reviews short-listing recommendations, with the aim of ensuring consistency across colleges.

Throughout the process all UCAS forms, test scores, contextual information, comments and interview grades are easily accessible to all college tutors involved with admissions via a web-based database.

Interviews

All short-listed candidates are invited to Oxford for interview around mid-December. The timetable of interviews by subject is available on an Admissions Office webpage well in advance.

Each applicant has a first-assigned college, which is either the college applied to or, in the case of open applications, a college randomly assigned by the Admissions Office in such a way as to even out the competition for places across colleges. Each applicant is also randomly assigned a second college by an algorithm so as to equalise across colleges the ratio of interviews per place.

During their time in Oxford, applicants are guaranteed interviews by at least two different colleges (their first- and second-assigned colleges) and may also be interviewed by other colleges. Applicants to joint degrees typically have separate interviews on the two disciplines.

Interviews are academic in nature. An applicant's performance is judged according to the admissions criteria. The interviews are graded on a scale of 1–9 against agreed descriptors.

One or more interviews by Skype, phone or video-conference facilities are typically arranged for any short-listed applicant who is unable to attend

interviews in Oxford. These interviews commonly take place in the week before the interviews in Oxford.

The colleges use various procedures in a coordinated effort to ensure that the strongest applicants are admitted to the University irrespective of college choice; these include transparency of all test results, interview grades, and UCAS forms amongst all tutors involved with admissions, and a final meeting of tutors at which the strongest unplaced applicants are collectively discussed and open offers are made. Typically around 30% of offers (34% in 2016) are either open offers or made by a college other than the first college considering the applicant.

Decisions are deemed to be official at the end of the final meeting; the short-listed applications are assigned a final overall grade. These decisions are then conveyed by tutors to their respective college offices for dissemination to short-listed applicants. There are standard offers for those taking A-levels, the International Baccalaureate or Advanced Highers; college tutors will seek advice from admissions tutors or the Admissions Coordinator in making other offers.

The figure overleaf gives a breakdown of admissions decisions based on MAT marks (excluding candidates who withdrew or failed to sit the test).

Feedback

Feedback, other than decisions, will not automatically be sent out, but applicants may seek feedback from their first-assigned colleges about any aspect of the admissions process. Feedback will not usually be sent out until the new year, once the admissions process is complete.

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Outcome based on MAT score