

2021 Admissions Round Feedback

Chemistry

Please note this is subject admissions feedback from the 2021 selection round - there will be changes each year, and these pages are only retained to provide a general indication of process.

The Chemistry admissions tutors would like to thank all applicants for the time and care they put into their applications. We are also grateful to referees for proving their supporting statements and for the encouragement and support they give to applicants.

There were 895 applicants for Chemistry at the University this year; 608 were shortlisted for interview, 199 offers were made for 2022 and three for 2023. All Oxford Chemistry applications were scored initially by the department, and the scores triaged against college scores obtained using the same criteria. Some candidates were reassigned amongst the colleges in order to maintain similar profiles of candidates across all colleges; candidates for reallocation were selected centrally and this was not an indication that an applicant had been rejected by their chosen. Some applicants were deselected by the department based on the relative strength of their applications.

At Keble, there were 37 first choice applicants, of whom 20 were shortlisted for interview. Two were allocated to Keble from other colleges. Eight offers were made for 2022, including six to applicants to Keble and two to applicants reallocated to Keble. One Keble applicant was made an offer at another college.

In their assessment of individual applications, the tutors took account of contextual data concerning relative individual and school performance as well as some background characteristics related to place of residence. This information is available only for applicants from within the UK. An explanation of how the University uses contextual data can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/decisions/contextual-data>.

This year tutors were also aware of the potential and uneven impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on both learning and assessment.

All interviews took place remotely via MS Teams and Miro whiteboards, and allowances were made in the event of poor connections. Each candidate was given two interviews in Keble: one of these focused on organic and inorganic chemistry, while the other focused on numerical and interpretive questions.

In making decisions on offers we took account of all the information available to us, including the UCAS application form and performance in interviews.

There are some items of general feedback on the interviews themselves:

- We aim to establish how effectively each candidate processes information that is new to them. While we are greatly impressed by the level of general knowledge and

factual recall of almost all our interviewees, we feel that their response to new material offers the best way to establish the candidates who will benefit most from a system that relies greatly on individual curiosity and application to problem-solving. Those considering preparations for interview might do well to spend time addressing new topics, and learning to articulate their thoughts about conceptual material. It tends to be obvious when candidates have experience of answering a particular question: under such circumstances, our practice is to ask a different question.

- The key is to be concise and articulate in your responses to questions, since the time-limit on the interview process is the same for all candidates. Our judgement is based in part on how far we can get in the time available.
- Don't be afraid to think aloud in the interview. It does no harm to back-track if you realise that you've got an idea wrong, but we can only do so during the course of the interview itself.
- We have noted over the last few years that some candidates excel at numerical aspects of their interviews, while others favour questions involving a more conceptual approach to chemistry. While it is fine (and probably inevitable) for people to favour one type of question over the other, it is essential for successful candidates to be able to address themselves to both parts of the process, and important to realise that both aspects are unavoidable parts of the undergraduate curriculum in Oxford.
- All candidates are asked at least one question about chemistry-related material in their personal statement. This is partly to put the candidate at ease on a familiar topic, but also to explore their understanding of an area in which they have expressed an interest. We cannot over-emphasise how it creates the wrong impression when a candidate seems unfamiliar with the material in their own personal statement, or with the central concept of a book that they claim to have read.