



2020 Admissions Round Feedback

English Language and Literature

Please note this is subject admissions feedback from the 2020 selection round - there will be changes each year, and these pages are only retained to provide a general indication of process.

Keble English looks holistically at candidates' performance across all areas – GCSE and predicted A Level (or equivalent) marks, contextual data, UCAS personal statement and references, submitted written work, the ELAT test, and (when shortlisted) interviewers' marks – in order to make decisions. All UCAS forms and pieces of written work are double-marked (sometimes triple-marked) by the interviewers, and we also look closely at any ELAT scripts which seem anomalous in any respect.

It is not possible to interview all applicants, so there is a shortlisting process based on the variables above. For UK candidates contextual data is also used, such as school performance and postcode data, as outlined on the Oxford Admissions website:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/decisions/contextual-data>

This year we received applications from many excellent and able candidates, and—as in previous years—choosing between them was very difficult indeed. Here at Keble we pride ourselves on our inclusivity and our commitment to outreach and access. Of the 9 candidates who received offers to read English this year, 6 were from state schools. For more information on outreach, see:

<https://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduates/outreach/>

The faculty-agreed shortlisting criteria can be found here:

<https://www.english.ox.ac.uk/shortlisting-and-selection-criteria-undergraduate>

When judging personal statements, we seek evidence of reading beyond the curriculum and wide-ranging engagement with literary texts. We look for thoughtfulness as well as passion, for analytical as well as enthusiastic readers. While extracurricular activities can lead into and out of academic study in fruitful ways, we encourage candidates to use the limited space available in the statement to focus on their interest in literature.

When marking written work, we were looking primarily for writing ability – the best evidence of an interest in words. High marks tended to go to those who gave sustained attention to matters of literary form and style, and to precision and coherence of argument.

Candidates who scored well in the ELAT, and had good exam results, written work, and references, were likely to be asked for interview. Candidates who showed low scores in

some of their application will only have been invited for interview with special consideration of other factors.

In 2020, Keble English tutors interviewed around 30 candidates for places in English language and literature and in English and modern languages. Shortlisted candidates had at least two interviews (20 minutes each, both conducted online via Microsoft TEAMS), and in both a large part of the discussion focused on an unseen poem which candidates were asked to read in advance. Towards the end of each interview, candidates were asked broader questions about their personal statement, and about various conceptual issues relating to literary study.

During interviews we were looking for evidence of clarity of thought and expression, analytical ability, flexibility, and thorough attention to stylistic details. The best interview performances came from those who thought carefully about the poem and who were prepared to defend their interpretations with lots of close reading from the text, to take on new information and perspectives, and to refine their thoughts during discussion. It may be worthwhile here to repeat some comments from previous years' reports on admissions: 'The very best candidates demonstrated: a real appetite for reading and ideas; a commitment to thinking through confusing things whilst not being afraid to be confused; a nuanced feeling for words and a willingness to be surprised by them. Some of the best candidates spoke hesitantly and stutteringly, and others of the best spoke confidently and fluently. Both kinds, though, looked closely at the literary object before them, and tried to describe how it was working.'

It is important to stress that, in making final decisions, we do not look just at interviews, but assess them in the context of the whole application. Interviews matter, but they are not our sole criterion in assigning places.

For more details about studying English at Keble, see:

<https://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduates/subjects/english/>