

2025 Admissions Round Feedback

English Language and Literature

Please note this is subject admissions feedback from the 2025 selection round; there will be changes each year and these pages are only retained to provide a general indication of process.

The English 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 providing their supporting statements and for the encouragement and support they give to applicants.

There were 21 first-choice applications to Keble this year for 5.5 places (there was one deferred place for a student on the Astrophoria Foundation Year), including applicants for joint school degrees. In addition, we also considered some candidates reallocated to us as well as some allocated to us as a second-choice college.

The admissions tutors look 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, and all interviewers' marks – in order to make decisions. All UCAS forms and pieces of written work are double-marked (sometimes triple-marked) by the interviewers.

In their assessment of individual applications, the tutors take account of contextual data concerning relative individual and school performance as well as some background characteristics related to place of residence. This information is usually available only for applicants from within the UK. Applicants are assessed according to the criteria agreed among the Colleges for English. These are available from here: <https://www.english.ox.ac.uk/what-we-look-for-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, and 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 UCAS statement to focus on their interest in literature. When marking written work, we look 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.

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 or poems which candidates were asked to read 30 minutes in advance. One of the interviews focused on a comparison between two unseen poems, and the other on a close reading of a single poem.

During interviews we were looking for evidence of clarity of thought and expression, analytical ability, flexibility, and thorough attention to formal details. The best interview performances came from those who thought carefully about the poem and who attended to style as well as content. These candidates were able to defend their interpretations with close readings from the text, but, equally importantly, they were also able to take on new information and perspectives, and to refine or even rethink 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.'

As in previous years, choosing between the many excellent and able candidates was very difficult indeed. 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. Here at Keble we pride ourselves on our inclusivity and our commitment to outreach and access. For more information on outreach, see:

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