

2023 Admissions Round Feedback Philosophy, Politics, and Economics

Please note this is subject admissions feedback from the 2023 selection round. There will be changes each year, and these pages are only retained to provide a general indication of process.

The PPE 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.

The University received 1766 applications for PPE this year, of whom 669 were shortlisted for interview. Offers were made to 267 applicants, 6 of which were for deferred entry. There were 49 first choice applications to Keble; 18 of these were shortlisted, and a single applicant was reallocated to Keble from another college. Eight offers were made for 2024 entry.

Details of this year's applications can be found at the PPE course website.

With such high numbers of applicants, it is not feasible to interview everyone for, and only those with a realistic chance of being made an offer are interviewed. The decision to shortlist was based on: UCAS information about past and predicted exam results; UCAS academic reference; and the result of the Thinking Skills Assessment test (TSA Oxford). For UK-based candidates, we are typically aware of achievement that goes above or below the norm for the school as measured by contextualized data, and we pay close attention to the possible and uneven impacts of the disruption to teaching and assessment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Thinking Skills Assessment is a two-hour test involving multiple-choice reasoning questions and an essay. Each candidate should be issued a statement of results by ATS (the TSA provider) in mid-January. They can be accessed via Cambridge Assessment's Results Online system. The average test performance of applicants at the different stages is set out in the summary report on the PPE course website.

Candidates who score well in the TSA, above an agreed threshold, and had good exam results and references were likely to be invited for interview. Those scoring below a lower threshold will only have been invited for interview with special consideration of other factors. Candidates who scored between the upper and lower thresholds may have been invited for interview. 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>.

Applications to colleges for PPE vary every year and colleges have varying numbers of places to offer. Where a college has a large number of shortlisted candidates relative to its places, there is a process by which candidates are reallocated to colleges with lower shortlisted candidate to place ratios. This process, which is operated centrally, is designed to minimise the effect of college choice on an applicant's chances of being made an offer. Candidates selected for reallocation are those for whom information available at the shortlisting stage suggests the chance of acceptance can be improved by reallocation.

PPE tutors are looking for evidence of the following qualities in applicants:

1. Application and interest: capacity for sustained study, motivation and interest, an independent and reflective approach to learning;
2. Reasoning ability: ability to analyse and solve problems using logical and critical approaches, ability to assess relevance, capacity to construct and critically assess arguments, flexibility and willingness to consider alternative views;
3. Communication: willingness and ability to express ideas clearly and effectively on paper and orally; ability to listen; ability to give considered responses.

Throughout the admissions process, tutors try to detect potential as a PPE student. Existing achievement (as revealed in official examinations, predicted examination results, and school reports), as well as performance in the pre-interview TSA admissions test and interview, are relied upon as evidence of potential.

At Keble, each shortlisted applicant was given three independent interviews by subject tutors in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. Interviews were conducted online via Teams. The Philosophy interviews consisted of two main questions, with discussion of each taking up about half of the interview. Each question was designed to test applicants' critical and analytical thinking skills. Neither required any previous experience in philosophy or specific background knowledge. There was no advance reading. Politics interviews also featured two questions which did not assume any background knowledge in the subject. In Economics, applicants were asked to work through problems set by the interviewers designed to test quantitative skills alongside critical reasoning skills.

Final decisions about offers used the full range of evidence available, including past and predicted exam results, the school report, the TSA admissions test and the interviews. Given that there are only eight places available a year for PPE in Keble, it was not possible to make an offer to every applicant whose potential might otherwise merit a place at the University.