



2019 Admissions Round Feedback

Theology & Religion / Philosophy & Theology

This is subject admissions feedback from the 2019 selection round. There will be changes each year, and these pages are only retained to provide a general indication of process.

As usual, this was an exceptionally competitive year. Decisions were difficult, and taken with great care and thought. As in previous years, tutors across different colleges worked together to ensure that the best candidates were offered places regardless of which college they had applied to, and a number of candidates who applied to Keble as a first-choice college were offered a place at another Oxford college after second interviews. All shortlisted candidates in Theology and Religion *and* Philosophy and Theology were interviewed by at least two colleges.

Shortlisting, Deselection, and Reallocation

The Faculty of Theology and Religion has admissions procedures which are partially centralised, including pre-interview reallocation and deselection to ensure an even distribution of candidates across colleges. The principle behind this is to ensure that a candidate's choice of college does not impact their chances of a successful application. This is why a candidate who indicates that their first-choice college is Keble may end up being summoned for interview at another college. Shortlisting begins in early November and the official selection criteria for Oxford undergraduate courses can be found on the web at: <http://www.theology.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate-admissions/how-to-apply/selectioncriteria.html>

Many different factors are taken into account in the assessment of individuals' performance on paper and at interview. Written work is blind-marked by two markers following a formal mark scheme, and contextual factors such as the performance of the candidate's school, as well as relevant personal circumstances, are carefully considered as each applicant's qualifications are reviewed. In assessing applications for the joint school with Philosophy, we also pay close attention to performance in the Philosophy Aptitude Test. As always, tutors across the university worked collaboratively to ensure that each shortlisted candidate was interviewed by at least two different colleges.

Keble received 28 total first-choice applicants for Theology and Joint Schools: 14 first-choice applications for Theology and Religion and 14 first-choice applications for Philosophy and

Theology. Decisions about deselection were finely balanced, and took account of quantitative data (“scores” given for GCSE performance, or marks for written work or the Philosophy Test), but also considered individual students in the round, drawing on references and the contextual information mentioned above. Keble deselected 14 candidates in total before interview, and after the reallocation process, we interviewed 15 first-choice candidates and 13 candidates from other colleges.

College tutors and the Faculty’s Admissions Committee examined all applications thoroughly before shortlisting and interviews, including consideration of examination results and predictions, as well as rigorous scrutiny of UCAS personal statements and references. In applicants’ personal statements, we seek evidence of reading beyond the curriculum and enthusiasm and thoughtful consideration of the subject to which the candidate is applying (and in the case of a joint school application, engagement with both Philosophy and Theology). Candidates whose test scores, written work marks, GCSE scores and A-level predictions or results were overall lower than average were among those we did not invite for interview.

Interviews

Interviews took place on Monday 9th and Tuesday 10th December 2019. First-choice applicants to Keble attended two Theology interviews: one 'General' interview, which involved broad discussion about the course and the nature of the discipline, motivation for study, and questions arising from each candidate’s application. The other Theology interview was a text-based exercise for which all candidates were given twenty minutes of preparation time before the interview, with extra time allocated for those who declared through the College Office that it was needed, in advance of the interview.

For joint school applicants, these qualities were also tested through the Philosophy test and interview, where certain distinctive skills are assessed, such as logic problem-solving. Candidates who applied for the joint school with Philosophy were automatically considered for a place in the single school, if they demonstrated greater strengths in Theology than in Philosophy.

Second college candidates were invited to attend one consolidated Theology interview with interviewers who had conducted both the 'General' and text-based interviews. Second college candidates in the joint school were also invited to attend one Philosophy interview. Remote interviews were designed to be as close to in-person interviews as logistically possible.

In the course of each interview, we were looking for evidence of motivation and interest, for

readiness to respond to and accommodate alternative perspectives, for clarity of thought and expression, and for the ability to engage in a close reading of a text and to perceive variations in texts with attention to fine detail. No prior knowledge of the subject was necessary for any stage of the interview process, and recounting familiarity with specific texts was not always helpful to candidates engaging directly with fresh questions. We were impressed by those who demonstrated an ability to think independently, and were able to take on new information or different perspectives and to refine their thoughts during discussion without losing their coherence. Furthermore, a good understanding of the course for which the candidate was applying is always an advantage. Enthusiasm, thoughtful responses to the questions asked, and receptivity to new ideas were all indications of a candidate's ability to flourish in the tutorial setting.

Places offered

This year we made three offers for Philosophy and Theology and a total of seven offers for Theology and Religion, including one offer for deferred entry in 2021 and one open offer.

In total, the Faculty of Theology and Religion received 118 applications for Theology and Religion, shortlisted 77 candidates, and made 49 offers. For Philosophy and Theology, there were 142 applications received, 55 applicants shortlisted, and 29 offers made.

It was, as always, a privilege to meet such a talented group of students. As we have made clear in the past, candidates who did not secure a place should not regard this decision as a definitive verdict on their intellectual quality and potential. We balance a number of factors in a very complex process and we remind candidates that we only see a snapshot of each of them at a particular moment in their development.

We are, as ever, eager to encourage schools which would not usually consider presenting candidates for Theology and Religion at Oxford to contact us and to see what the course and college can offer. Please contact the College Office for further information.