

## Theology & Religion, Philosophy & Theology 2021 Admissions Round Feedback

**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 Theology and Philosophy 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.

The University received 166 applications for Philosophy and Theology (60 shortlisted) and 94 for Theology and Religion (65 shortlisted); at the time of writing, 34 and 31 offers had been made respectively. Keble had 26 applications in total for the two courses. Following shortlisting and college reallocation, eight applicants were considered for Theology & Religion and six for Philosophy & Theology. The aim of shortlisting and college reallocation is to ensure that there are at least two applicants for every place available in all the colleges.

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: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses-listing/theology-and-religion?wssl=1>.

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.

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.

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.

Interviews took place online through Microsoft Teams. Interviews for both first and second college candidates in both Theology and Religion and Philosophy and Theology included 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) and broader discussion about the course, the nature of the discipline, the candidate's motivation for study, and questions arising from each candidate's application. 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.

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.

Keble has seven places available for Theology & Religion and Philosophy & Theology. We aim to admit 4 students for the former and 3 for the latter, although the precise division varies year by year depending on the applicant pool. This year, five offers were made for Theology & Religion and two offers (one deferred) for Philosophy & Theology. One applicant for Philosophy & Theology was made an offer at another college. The tutors are keen to support the College's strategy for widening access to the University, and we were pleased to be able to make an offer under the Opportunity Oxford programme (details of which can be

found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/increasing-access/opportunity-oxford>.)

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.