



# Preparing students for admissions tests and interviews



# Coming up

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A deeper understanding  
of admissions tests and  
interviews

Identify different types of  
tests and interviews used  
by Russell Group  
universities

Consider how to help  
your students prepare for  
admissions tests and  
interviews



# Admissions Tests

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# Ice-breaker: What do you currently do?

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# Admissions Tests

**Many Russell Group universities use admissions tests to inform the decision-making process. They can be used in different ways:**

- To inform whether an offer should be made.
- To decide whether to invite a student to interview.
- Following an interview, to decide between two equally ranked applicants.

**The good news is that most university applicants do not have to take any kind of additional admissions**



Students need to be proactive and research which of their university choices require admissions tests, which tests they require, and what the deadlines are.

# The logistics

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## Registration deadlines, where and when the tests are held, and UCAS deadlines

- Tests generally take place between **August and November the year before** starting the course.
- Oxbridge applicants will usually have to take admissions tests earlier, due to the early UCAS application deadline.
- Test locations vary depending on the type of test – these can be found on the admissions test websites.
- Some tests have a cost associated (approximately £50-£100) but bursaries may be available.



# Commonly used tests

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- **UCAT**

- The most used test for Medicine and Dentistry courses
- Assesses verbal reasoning, decision-making, quantitative reasoning, abstract reasoning and situational judgement
- Testing runs from July-October, and students can book up to 90 days in advance.

**25%**

of students who took  
the UCAT in 2023  
achieved a Band 1 in  
Situational Judgement

- **MAT (Mathematics Admissions Test)**

- Used to test mathematical ability
- Commonly used by the University of Oxford (for Maths and Computer Science) and Imperial College London (for Maths).

- **STEP (Sixth Term Examination Paper)**

- Mathematics
- Consists of up to three paper-based examinations
- Takes place in June during the summer exam season

# Commonly used tests

- **LNAT (Law National Aptitude Test)**

- For applicants to Law
- Online test in two parts
- Register from August, Oxbridge applicants must take the test by 15<sup>th</sup> October (others differ, check the LNat website)

- Help them to prepare:
  - Practice, practice, practice
  - Use online resources at [lnat.ac.uk](https://lnat.ac.uk)
  - Financial assistance is available
  - Its meant to be hard! Prepare them for this.

**33%**

**of Russell Group universities  
require the LNat for admission  
onto their Law courses.**





# Less commonly used tests

- **Supplementary Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)**
  - For some Vet School applicants
  - Often used to assess 'alternative' work experience as well checking situational\* and/or professional understanding of the industry/sector.
  - Typically sent out to students by the universities once they've received their applications via UCAS.
- **\*Situational Judgement Tests (SJT)**
  - Some Vet schools also use SJT's to assess students' situational awareness through scenario-based multiple-choice questions

## Top Tip:

When having 1:1's with your students encourage them to check each of their chosen universities 'admissions statements' for their course choices!

Read more  
on the  
University  
of Bristol  
webpage:



# How to prepare

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- **Practice papers** – Support students to practice questions under examination conditions. Timing is important. Practice tests and answers are available on test websites.
- **Read the guidance** – Students should read the guidance for candidates. This will help them understand the structure of the test and how it is used by universities.
- **Deadlines** – Ensure you and your students know the deadlines - some courses may not accept a student if they have not taken the test.
- **Study groups** – Encourage groups of students undertaking the same tests to form study groups to support each other.
- **Mailing lists** – Staff can sign up to University Outreach/Admissions mailing lists to receive email reminders about when admissions tests registrations are open.



# Admissions Tests



Universities	MAT	LNAT	STEP	TSA	UCAT	TMUA	ESAT
University of Birmingham							
University of Bristol			**				
University of Cambridge							
Cardiff University							
Durham University							
University of Edinburgh							
University of Exeter							
University of Glasgow							
Imperial College London							
King's College London							
University of Leeds							
University of Liverpool							
London School of Economics							
University of Manchester							
Newcastle University							
University of Nottingham							
University of Oxford							
Queen Mary University of London							
Queen's University Belfast							
University of Sheffield							
University of Southampton			**				
University College London			**				
University of Warwick					Postgrad entry only.		
University of York							

\*\* May give a reduced offer.

Warwick strongly encourage students planning on entering the Mathematics and Statistics, MORSE or Data Science degree courses to take an additional maths paper (STEP, TMUA, AEA, MAT).

# Interviews

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# Interviews

**Russell Group universities may use interviews to help them decide which candidates should receive offers. Universities may:**

- Interview for all courses (e.g., Oxford and Cambridge)
- Have two interviews: one of the course, and another for the college/university
- Interview for specific courses only
- Use interviews for information gathering
- Use interviews as an opportunity for the applicant

**Many universities provide (free) accommodation for applicants during the interview process.**



*“Decisions are not based on your manners, appearance or background, but on your ability to think independently and to engage with new ideas beyond the scope of your school or college syllabus.”*  
– University of Oxford, Why Does Oxford Interview?



# Interviews

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Very few universities interview for all their courses. The main exceptions are Oxford and Cambridge. Imperial College also interview for most courses. Other may interview for some courses.

- **Common subjects requiring interviews:**

- Medicine
- Dentistry
- Nursing
- Education
- Music
- Art and Design

- What's the link?



# Why do we use interviews

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There are several reasons why some universities and some courses require an interview:

- Competition
- Academic potential
- The right fit
- To see examples of your work



# Types of interviews

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There are different types of interviews, the structure can differ depending on the university or course. Example types:

## Individual interviews

- Panel or one-to-one
- Traditional method
- Opportunity to ask questions
- Could be very subject-specific or more general
- Academic discussion rather than traditional questions (Oxford and Cambridge)



## Group interviews

- Q&A session
- Task or scenario
- Contributions from each candidate

# MMI Interview



**Multiple mini-interviews may be used by professional courses such as Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science and Nursing.**

- Typically consists of six to ten different stations
- No more than 10 mins each
- Assess qualities required for that course and profession

*“Keeping abreast of medical issues appearing in the news and media and discussing and debating them with friends and family” – University of Birmingham, How to Prepare*

## **Example stations include:**

- Traditional interview questions
- Working through a scenario
- Written exercise
- Interacting with an actor
- Data interpretation
- Ethical reasoning



## Sample MMI questions and scenarios

How would you answer these questions?

1. You're a medical student and you see a patient who you recognise from your GP placement in a supermarket car park, getting into a car. You remember the GP telling the patient that he is unable to drive due to his uncontrolled epilepsy. Discuss the relevant ethical issues with the examiner.

2. Without using your hands, explain how to tie shoe-laces.

3. Discuss one of your hobbies outside of school and how the skills you gained from this activity will help you in your career.

4. What personal qualities do you think are not required for a Nurse?

5. Role play: You are on your way home from a lecture and you reach a bus stop. A student from your course is sat at the bus stop looking very upset. You don't know their name and you haven't spoken to them before. Demonstrate how you would approach this situation.

How would you support your students to practice these questions?



# How students can prepare

**There are some things that your students can do before an interview that will make them feel more confident.**

- Think about how they might answer possible questions – students can practice with friends, family and teachers.
- Be careful not to over-rehearse – interviewers will not want to hear scripted answers.
- For academic discussions – practice speaking out loud when completing homework.
- Read around the subject and think about relevant topics that particularly interest them.
- Reread their personal statement.

Students with disabilities are entitled to accessibility adjustments for interviews.

Your students should email the university or check the university's Accessibility and Disability Services webpage to find out what is available to them.

# How staff can support students

**Research** – Create the space and time for your students to research the course and university beforehand. University websites often have interview tips and advice pages which can also support students.

**Practice** – Set up mock interviews at your school or college. Encourage students to think about their body language whilst interviewing. Practice should support students in being as relaxed as possible at the interview, so they can be themselves and confident in their knowledge and abilities.

**Prepare** – Help students to prepare responses to standard questions such as “why do you want to study this subject?”, and to think of questions to ask the interviewer(s). Make sure students know how to get to the interview.

**Reassure** – Support students with combatting imposter syndrome “It’s not for me”.

Tip: Students can wear casual clothing to Oxbridge interviews if they prefer this.

# STAR technique

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- **Situation**

- Students should begin by very briefly presenting a recent challenge or situation in which they found themselves.

- **Task**

- Students should briefly explain the task and what they set out to achieve.

- **Action**

- What did the student do? The interviewer will be looking to find out what action the student took, why, and what the alternatives were.

- **Results**

- What was the outcome of the student's actions? What was achieved through the actions taken and did they meet the objectives? What was learned from this experience and has this learning been used since?



# Additional resources

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# Further resources

- **Admissions testing service:** <http://www.admissionstesting.org/>
- **LNAT:** <https://lnat.ac.uk/>
- **MAT:** <https://www.maths.ox.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate-study/maths-admissions-test>
- **STEP:** <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/step/about-step/>
- **UCAT:** <https://www.ucat.ac.uk/>
- **TMUA/ESAT:** <https://esat-tmua.ac.uk/about-the-tests/tmua-test/>
- **The Uni Guide interview preparation tips:** <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/ucas-application/university-interviews-how-to-prepare>
- **UCAS information page about admissions tests:** <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/admissions-tests>
- **UCAS advice on interviews:** <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/after-you-apply/undergraduate-interview-invitations>
- **Advancing Access:** [www.advancingaccess.ac.uk](http://www.advancingaccess.ac.uk)

**Frequently used tests**

Universities	BMAT	LNAT	STEP	TSA	UKCAT
University of Birmingham					✓
University of Bristol		✓	*		✓
University of Cambridge	✓		✓	✓	
Cardiff University					✓
Durham University		✓			✓
University of Edinburgh					✓
University of Exeter					✓
University of Glasgow		✓			✓
Imperial College London	✓		*		
King's College London		✓	*		✓
University of Leeds	✓				✓
University of Liverpool					✓
London School of Economics and Political Science					
University of Manchester					
Newcastle University					
University of Nottingham					
University of Oxford					
Queen Mary University of London					
Queen's University Belfast					
University of Sheffield					
University of Southampton					
University College London					
University of Warwick					
University of York					

**★ May take results**  
STEP is used in different ways to university? guidebook.

**ADVANCING ACCESS** / In leading universities working together with schools and colleges

**Preparing for interview**

**Possible questions**

Your students are likely to be asked questions that:

- are related to the course they have applied for
- ask them to expand on information in their application form

Encourage your students to think about questions that might be asked and how they would answer them. The questions could include:

- Why do you want to study at this university?
- Why have you chosen this subject/course?
- What are your areas of interest in this subject?

**Practise the interview**

Encourage your students to practise answering questions about their subject and wider interests with their friends, family and teachers. You may wish to ask your colleagues to give your students a practice interview so they can gain experience of expressing their ideas and opinions to someone who does not know them so well.

However, interviews will not want to hear prepared answers. Over-rehearsed answers can be counterproductive if the student is preoccupied with recalling set speeches on general topics rather than listening to the interviewers' questions and responding accordingly.

**The subject**

In some interviews, your students will be asked to talk about the subject they have applied to study. Encourage your students to read their personal statement, any academic projects it mentions, and any written work they have submitted.

Encourage them to think about topics relevant to the subject that particularly interest them. Where possible, they should try to reference the author and/or title of publications they have read.

Encourage your students to read around the subject. Section two of the guidebook, **Helping your students prepare**, provides some useful tips.

## Why use admissions assessments?

- To differentiate between well-qualified candidates
- To give us a common set of data with which to compare applicants to a specific course
- To stretch and challenge applicants
- To assess the aptitude and potential of candidates
- To help to select for places at interview and/or for places on courses
- If appropriate, to assess subject knowledge and understanding





# Questions?

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