

# Cambridge Admissions in Context



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

CHURCHILL COLLEGE  
CAMBRIDGE



# Critical for application success

## The four 'R's

- Right subject
- Excellent examination record
- Read and think – critically and analytically
- Embed your learning and revise



# What do we look for in applicants?

- Genuine subject interest
- Good 'fit' between applicant and course
- Very strong exam results
- Excellent UCAS reference
- Potential
  - Core knowledge and technical fluency
  - Focus and determination
  - Ability to learn independently
- Vocational commitment (where appropriate)



# Key information in selection

## **Selection is holistic and data-driven**

- Results in public examinations
  - Mainly Years 12 and 13
- UCAS reference
- UCAS personal statement
- Contextual information
- Submitted work
- Performance at interview
  - Can include informal tests



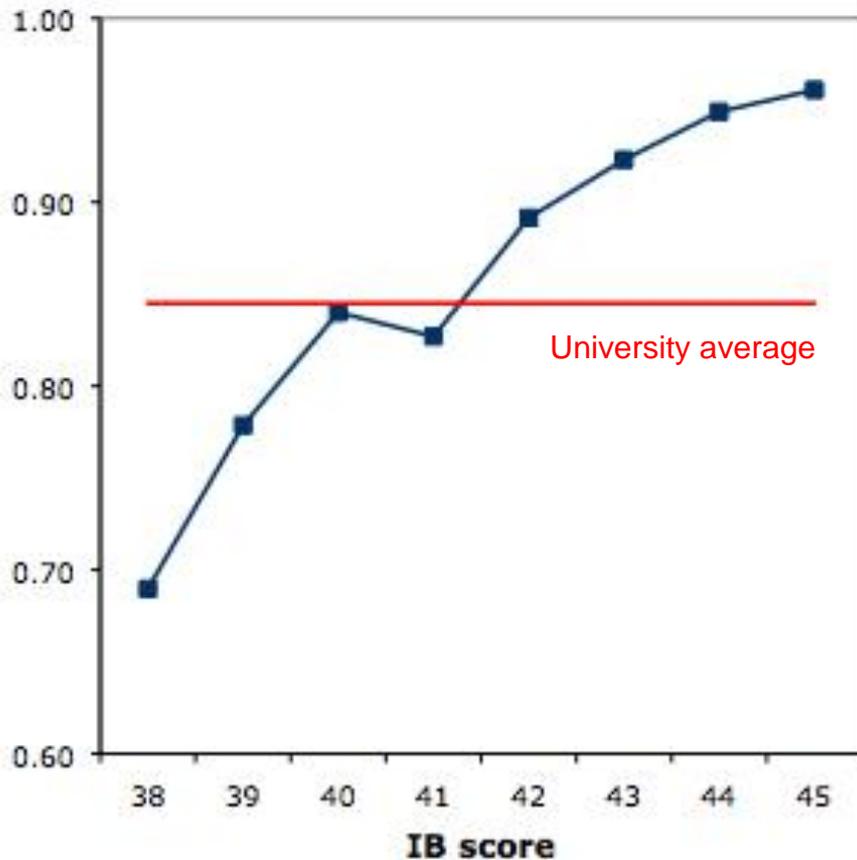
# Research background: fundamentals

- Ongoing, comprehensive research into the interrelationship between admissions decisions and Cambridge outcomes
- AS/A2 UMS correlate strongly with Tripos results ( $\sim 0.4$  on the Pearson scale)
- A2 grades and IB performance also correlate strongly with Tripos
- GCSEs broadly correlate ( $\sim 0.25$ ), but less strongly than exams sat later in a student's academic career
- Aptitude tests are less effective ( $\sim 0.2$ ), though can have some utility
- Interviews should be used cautiously but can be effective in identifying potential

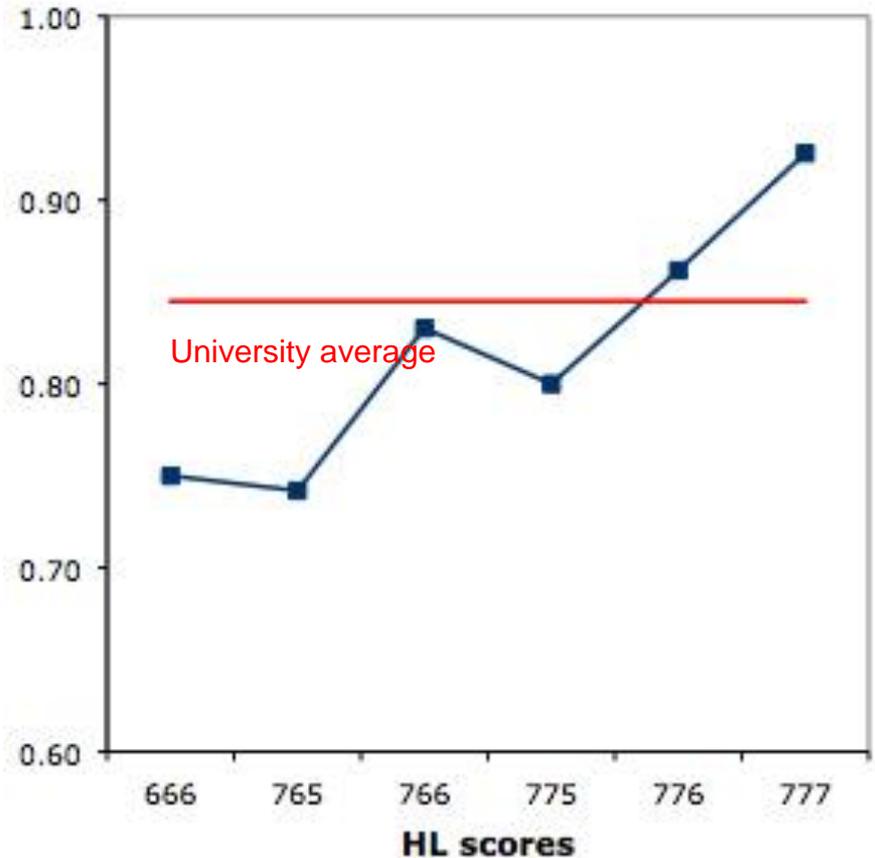


# Research background: IB data (1)

Probability of a 1st or a II.1 by IB score  
- Arts subjects

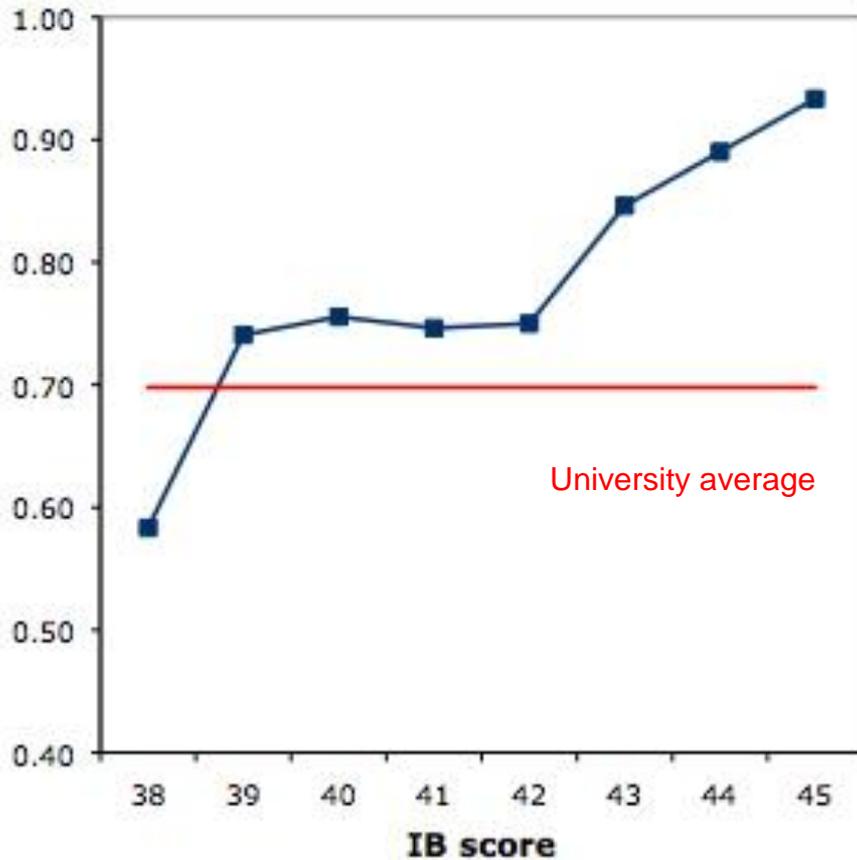


Probability of a 1st or a II.1 by HL scores  
- Arts subjects

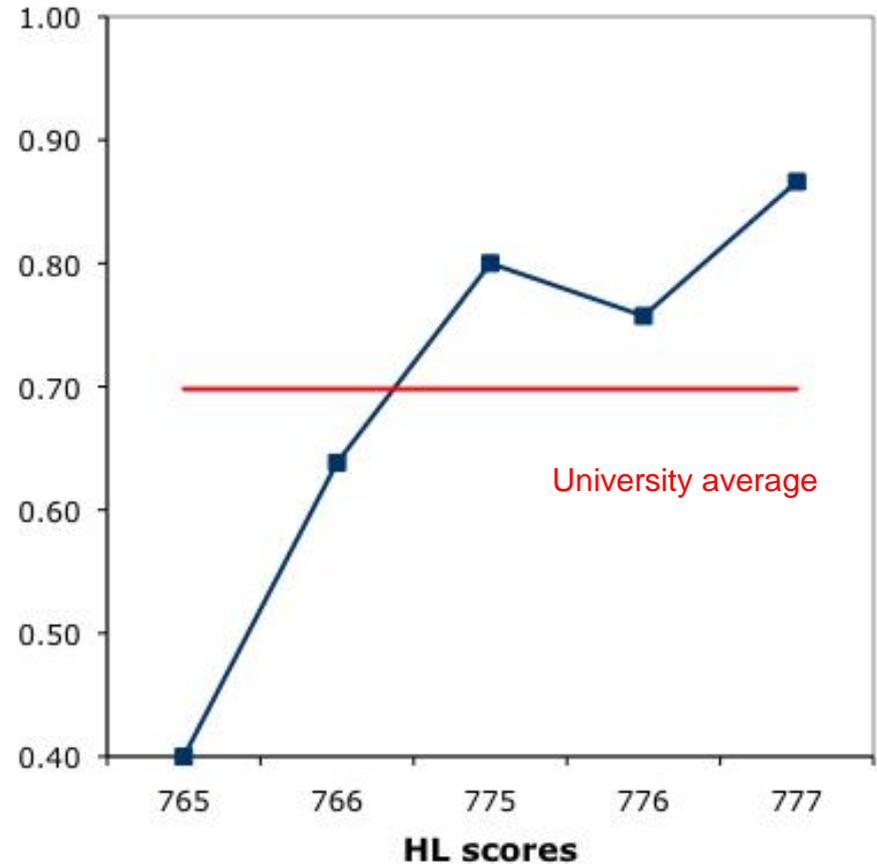


# Research background: IB data (2)

Probability of a 1st or a II.1 by IB score  
- Science subjects



Probability of a 1st or a II.1 by HL scores  
- Science subjects



# UCAS reference

- Most references describe excellent students but few describe exceptional ones
- The most helpful references:
  - Are consistent and specific, indicating where an applicant lies in relation to his/her peers
  - Emphasise the academic and the subject-related
  - Tell us about organisation and focus
- Back the genuinely exceptional to the hilt but be realistic
- Trust us to read between the lines
- Write extra letters if circumstances change significantly
- Cambridge Extenuating Circumstances Form



# Sample reference (1)

'She is extremely well motivated and conscientious, with outstanding intellectual ability and great personal charm. An exceptionally well rounded student, she has contributed so much to the life of the school. She is an outstanding geographer with the potential to succeed at university. She has developed excellent cartographic, graphical and statistical skills. She contributes well to discussion and has made good presentations to the group. She is highly organised and expresses herself well in both oral and written English... She is an exemplary student with an excellent academic record and impressive commitment to the school, as Deputy Head Girl, as well as to the wider community'.



# Sample reference (2)

'She is an exceptionally gifted student – one of the most erudite and cerebral to have passed through this school. Her decision to study History at university is eminently appropriate given her long-held fascination with, and insatiable appetite for, the subject. She is a scholarly and forensic historian who responds to primary and secondary sources alike with incredible enthusiasm and commitment. Her analytical and evaluative skills are acute and her knowledge – built through reading – extensive. She has in abundance the clarity of thought and meticulousness that are needed for her intended degree... She also has a laconic sense of humour, a product of her intellectualism, no doubt, and esoteric, discriminatory musical taste... It is easy to trot out platitudes in a UCAS reference but she is a superb student of immense potential, easily capable of obtaining a First at university'.



# Personal statements

- Chiefly a starting-point for interviews
- Students should write with integrity
- Cover
  - Your interest in your course
  - Relevant subjects you have studied
- Also discuss super-curricular exploration
  - Reading
  - Other wider exploration
  - Relevant work experience
- *Extra-curricular activities do not figure in our considerations*



# Tests & submitted work

- Tests are primarily an adjunct to interviews
- Formal aptitude-testing occurs only in Medicine & Vet Med (BMAT)
  - Those sitting BMAT should revise GCSE science (or equivalent) and complete a practise test
- Submitted work should ideally be recent
  - Be prepared to discuss it at interview



# Interviews: format

- Typically two interviews of 20-30 minutes each
- Conducted by subject specialists
- Interactive tests of
  - Interest
  - Aptitude
  - Core knowledge
- Problem-solving scenarios and discussion
- No hidden agenda and no trick questions
- Be yourself



# Interviews: what to expect

- Focused and challenging questions
- We might talk about
  - Academic work
  - Reading and other super-curricular exploration
  - Subject-related wider awareness
  - 'Prompt' material
- New approaches to existing knowledge
- Prompting from interviewers
- Questions to interviewers



# Pitfalls (1)

## At the application stage

- Wrong subject or course
- Exam results cause concern
- Inconsistent UCAS reference
- Little or no reading and/or other super-curricular exploration
  - Often witnessed in a personal statement that is lacking in academic focus and depth



# Pitfalls (2)

## At interview

- Little evidence of revision/subject knowledge insecure (under-preparation)
- Rehearsed answers and/or insistence on 'performing' (over-preparation)
- Insufficient critical engagement
- Lack of clarity/flexibility of thought
- Unwillingness to admit to perceived weakness or explain thinking



# Extra support in Year 13

- Check recent results – emergence of new candidates
- Interview support – mock interviews, for which use University resources
- Encourage consolidation of taught knowledge and wider exploration
- Strongly encourage practise for any test and revision in advance of interview
- Gather feedback from interviews



# Summary

## Critical to a strong application

- Right course
  - Match of aptitude and interests
- Recent academic track record
  - Has to be excellent – unless there are significant extenuating circumstances
- Read
  - Outside the course
- Revise
  - The material you have studied



# Finding out more

## University

- Undergraduate admissions
  - [www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate](http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate)
- Admissions research
  - [www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/admissions/research/](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/admissions/research/)
- Faculty and departmental web pages

## Churchill

- Admissions office
  - [www.chu.cam.ac.uk/admissions](http://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/admissions)

