

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS

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From the Physics Admissions Coordinator



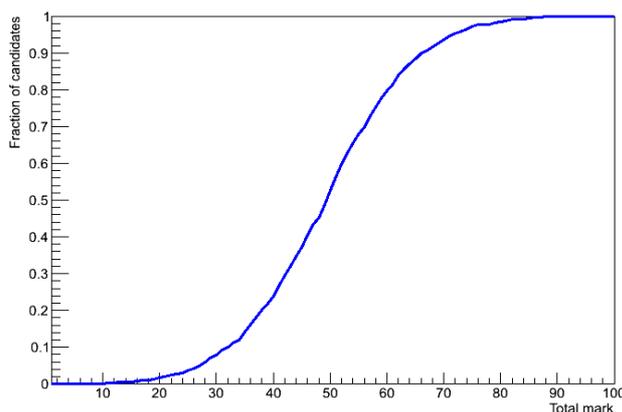
Report on the Physics Aptitude Test 2014

Oxford Physics receives a large number of applications for places on both the Physics and Physics and Philosophy courses. In 2014 there were a total of 1171 applicants contesting around 190 places, close to 6 applicants per place. In the short-listing, we used the results of our Physics Aptitude Test to guide us in reducing the number of applicants to around 2.5 per place.

These tests have been run for several years, and are known to be good predictors of future performance at Oxford; in particular they are known to be better predictors than GCSE results. The tests are set to a defined syllabus and the contents are checked by school teachers to ensure that they are set at an appropriate level. The maths and physics tests are combined into a single two-hour paper, with candidates asked to write their answers in the spaces provided on the question paper. Further details including sample papers can be found on the Oxford Physics Admissions website www2.physics.ox.ac.uk/admissions/.

We are extremely grateful to all the schools and test centres for hosting candidates and bearing with us through inevitable hitches. A printing error which obscured the last two letters in one question was accounted for in awarding marks. In other respects, the great majority of tests went smoothly, and in the small number of cases where there were difficulties we have made due allowance in interpreting marks. We took into account medical certificates and letters drawing attention to adversities in applicants' personal lives. We are grateful for the advice we have received from schools on making the administration of these tests simpler, and expect to continue to make minor changes reflecting this advice in subsequent years.

Our primary short-listing criterion is the total mark achieved on the combined test, which ranged from 10 to 90, with a mean mark of 49.6 and a standard deviation of 13.5. More details are



shown in the graph, where the y-axis is the fraction of candidates achieving the x-axis score or less. All applicants scoring 55 and above were short-listed. A small number of applicants below this cut-off whose application forms showed other evidence of excellence or had been ill during the test were added, to arrive at a final short-list of around 500 candidates who were invited to Oxford for interview (candidates from outside Europe who could not come to Oxford were interviewed by Skype or by telephone).

A key element of the Oxford Admissions process is that the chance of admission should not depend on the applicant's choice of College. Our short-listing is, therefore, followed by a reallocation process, in which candidates are transferred from Colleges with large numbers of candidates to Colleges with a smaller number of candidates, so as to ensure that the number of candidates per place is approximately constant across the collegiate University. This year 81 candidates were reallocated. Reallocation has been practised by the University for many years, assuring that all strong candidates have the same chance of obtaining places at Oxford, although possibly not at their first choice Colleges.