

# Cambridge and other top universities: how to make good choices in Year 11

**Dr. Mark King**

**Admissions and Outreach Officer  
Christ's College, Cambridge**

# Why University?

- Best way into an excellent career with higher earning potential (28% average increase for men and 53% for women)<sup>1</sup>.
- Access to excellent teaching and fantastic resources – explore your subject like never before.
- Meet people from different backgrounds, make connections for your future and long-lasting friendships based on shared experience.
- Independence
- Expand your horizons



<sup>1</sup> Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, Research Paper No. 112

# Oxbridge and the Russell Group

- Many different types of university
- Top universities in the UK are Russell Group
- Includes Oxbridge universities

**RUSSELL**  
INTERNATIONAL  
EXCELLENCE  
**GROUP**



## Characteristics:

- Top of their field in many academic subjects
- World class research facilities and staff
- Traditional course structure (some modular courses)
- Some intense, small group teaching (Oxbridge in particular)
- Highly competitive: A\*AA in Arts subjects A\*A\*A in Sciences at Cambridge



# Why Cambridge?



- Broad range of courses
- World-class teaching – lectures, seminars/classes, practicals
- Small-group teaching – tutorials/supervisions
- Excellent facilities and resources
- Academic, pastoral and financial support
- Wide range of extra-curricular options
- Excellent graduate opportunities, irrespective of degree discipline

# **Year 11: What can you do?**

# Doing your best in Year 11

- Move to linear A-Levels means GCSEs will probably be your most recent external examination results by the time you apply, so try to do your very best
- BUT don't panic if things don't go exactly to plan – universities do not believe GCSEs are strong indicators of future performance
- Most important thing is to start to make informed decisions about your future education

# Starting to think about what you want to study

- University education in the UK is subject-focused
- Admissions Tutors for competitive courses are looking for students with a proper, well-founded interest in the subject
- Do your best to identify a subject that really interests you and apply for that
- How do you identify the ‘right’ subject for you?
  - What subject are you enthusiastic about?
  - Does the course interest you?
  - How long is the course?
  - How are you assessed?
- Don’t worry if you just don’t know right now – try to narrow down your broader interests

# Course choice and career prospects

- Some careers **require** a specific degree, e.g. Architecture; Engineering; Medicine; Veterinary Medicine
- Some jobs in the commercial or business world (~5% of the total) also require particular degree subjects: typically, Mathematics or Languages



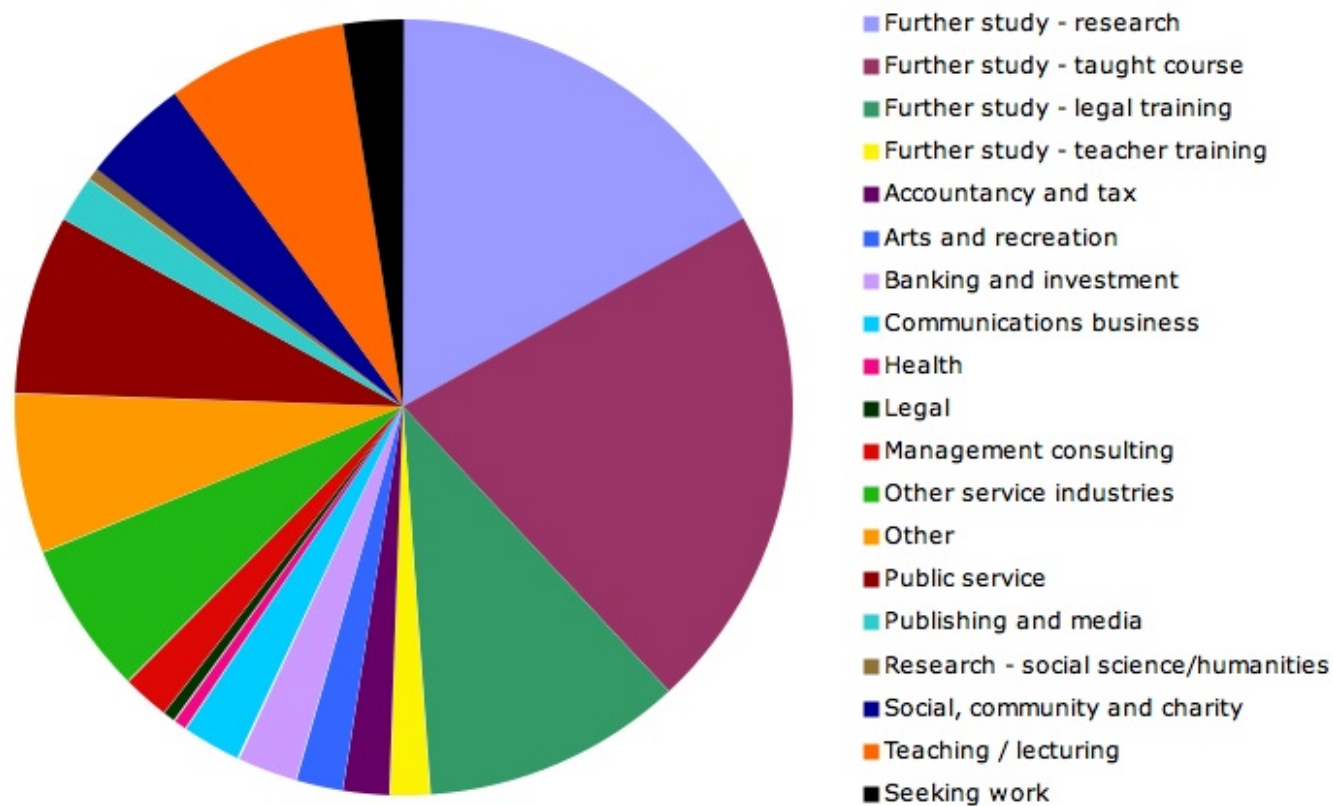


# Course choice and career prospects

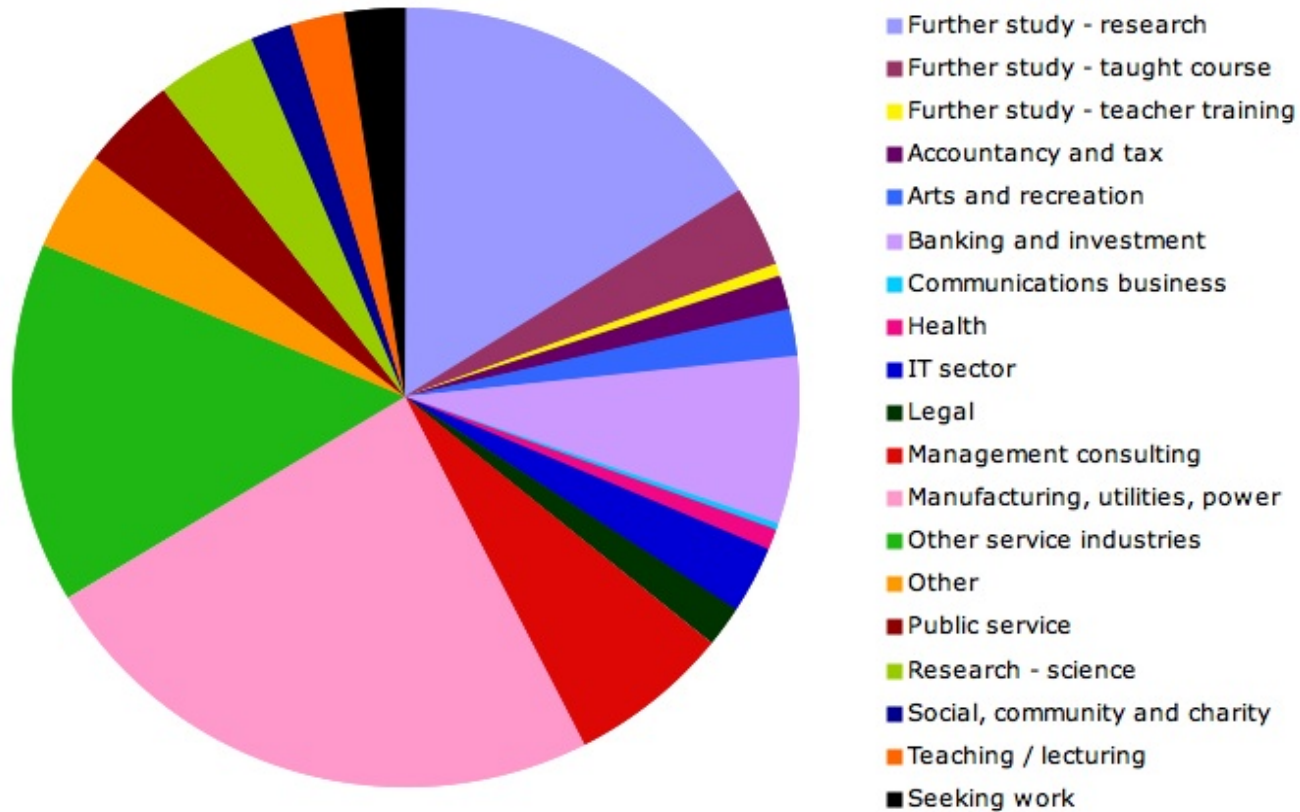
- The majority of top jobs **don't** specify a degree subject – they ask for a good degree (Class I or II.1) from a good university, in **any** subject (and if necessary professional training follows). Work experience is often important, though.
- Typical 'open access' careers include:

Law  
Teaching  
Business  
Journalism and publishing  
Public administration  
IT  
Accountancy and finance

# Graduate destinations of Cambridge historians



# Graduate destinations of Cambridge engineers



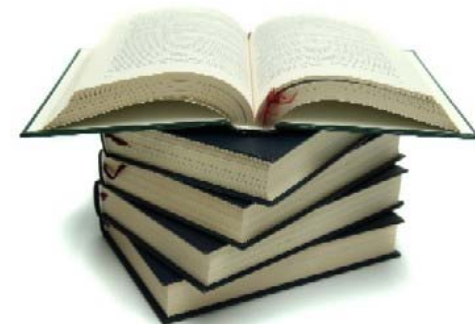
# Courses available at Cambridge

## ARTS

Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic  
Archaeology  
Architecture  
Asian and Middle Eastern Studies  
Classics  
Economics  
Education  
English  
Geography  
History  
History & Politics  
History & MML  
History of Art  
Human, Social and Political Sciences  
Land Economy  
Law  
Linguistics  
Modern and Medieval Languages  
Music  
Philosophy  
Theology and Religious Studies

## SCIENCES

Chemical Engineering  
Computer Science  
Engineering  
Mathematics  
Medicine  
Natural Sciences  
Psychological and Behavioural Sciences  
Veterinary Medicine



# Choosing your A-Levels

- Cambridge and other top universities look for students who have studied subjects that prepare them for their university course
- Some subjects (particularly sciences) have compulsory A-Level requirements – without these you are exceptionally unlikely to be offered a place
- Research the courses you are interested in to check whether you need something you might not have thought about
- Think carefully about the number of subjects you want to study – our standard offers are A\*A\*A or A\*AA, so would you stand a better chance doing just three A-Levels?

# Arts and Social Sciences

- If you'd like to study an arts or social sciences course at university but you're not sure which one, then English Literature, History, languages and Mathematics are good 'keystone' subjects.
- Other good choices to combine these subjects with include: an additional language, Ancient History, Classical Civilisation, Economics, Further Mathematics, Geography, Philosophy, Religious Studies and sciences.
- More specific subjects (e.g. Archaeology, English Language, Environmental Science, Government and Politics, History of Art, Law, Music, Psychology or Sociology) are useful if you want to do a related degree course.
- All these are considered "academic" A-Levels. None are considered to be "better" than others – it is up to you to pick the ones you think are most relevant for what you want to do.

# Sciences

- Most successful applicants take three or four of the following: biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, further mathematics.
- If you are planning to study biological or medical sciences you should take chemistry.
- For physical sciences or engineering you should take A-Level mathematics and physics, and ideally further mathematics. Chemistry is also very useful for physical sciences since it opens up large areas of the course.
- Other possible subject choices - for instance computer science, design and technology, electronics or psychology - may be useful preparation for some of our science courses. It depends what you want to do.

# Subject-specific

- Economics at Cambridge is very maths-focussed. Mathematics and further mathematics are your best preparation.
- Architecture: physics, mathematics and art are a good combination.
- Languages: more than one language at A-Level shows your strength.
- Law: A-Level law is not necessary. Arts subjects like history and English literature are better preparation.
- Classics: at least one of Latin or Ancient Greek is expected.



# Subjects you might not have considered

- Interested in international development, environmental policy, or NGOs?  
Consider Land Economy
- There are now many joint degrees combining history with other subjects (history and politics; history and languages; Human, Social and Political Sciences; history of art) or you can look to specialise (Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic or Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)
- The archaeology degree has options including anthropology, Egyptology and Assyriology – all great for social scientists
- Can't get enough of Kant? Philosophy or even Theology might be for you

# Where can I find out more?

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses>

Your one-stop shop for information on all the universities courses, including guidance on the subjects you should take at A-Level

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events/subjectmatters>

Our subject guidance page, where you can download our guidance booklet and see events that we run

[aces@christs.cam.ac.uk](mailto:aces@christs.cam.ac.uk)

My email – I'll be happy to answer your questions

# Making a Competitive Application: What is Cambridge looking for?

**Independent  
thought**

**Academic  
potential**

**Academic  
ability**

**Interest  
in your  
subject**

**Commitment  
to study**

# How do I demonstrate an interest in my subject?

- Reading books, journals, magazines and online articles
- Watching documentaries and online talks, lectures or seminars
- Keeping up to date with the latest developments in your subject
- Watching/listening to/reading any other media related to your subject
- Going to museums, concerts, or other associated public events
- Taking part in trips, expeditions, competitions, conferences, etc.
- Getting relevant work experience (esp. for vocational subjects)
- Doing extra work using libraries and online resources
- Talking about your subject with your teachers, peers, families, etc.



# Where do I find all this extra stuff?

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses>

Again, look up your subject on this website. Each course has a 'resources' tab that contains links to useful enrichment material.

<http://www.myheplus.com/>

Our subject enrichment website, where you can access great super-curricular enrichment material.

[aces@christs.cam.ac.uk](mailto:aces@christs.cam.ac.uk)

My email – I'll be happy to point you in the right direction.

**Good Luck!**

**Any Questions?**