



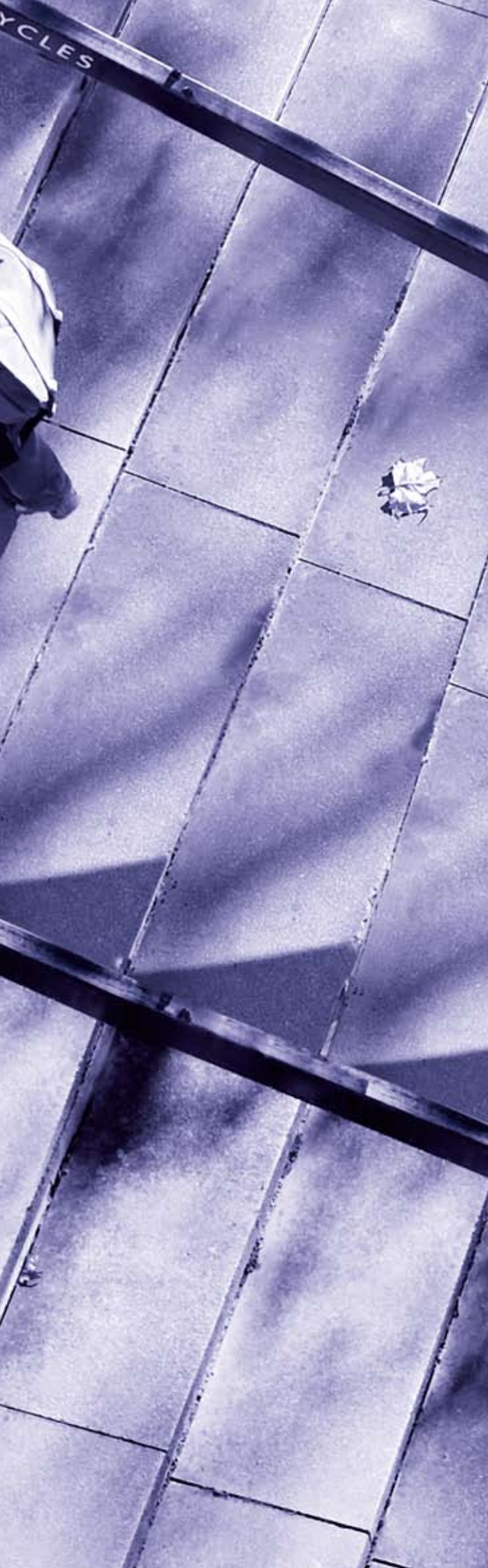
UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

# ENGLISH AT OXFORD

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD







## Why English?

English is one of the most rewarding degree subjects you can take at university, giving you the opportunity to study a challenging and diverse range of literature written in English, including poems, fiction, plays and essays. You will get to know the writings of particular authors, movements, and periods in great detail and develop your own interests in English literature and language – interests that we hope will remain with you for the rest of your life. This kind of study affords a unique way of appreciating the cultural history of England and other countries in which English has been a major literary medium.

An English degree will equip you with analytical and writing skills that are readily transferable into many other situations and many professions. It opens up the opportunity to go into a great variety of careers. Some of our recent graduates talk about what their English degree has meant for their life after Oxford at the end of this booklet.



# Why Oxford?

We believe that Oxford offers you the best English course in the country, along with outstanding tuition, library, and IT facilities. The Oxford English course has recently been revised to reflect the interests and needs of a new generation of undergraduates and further revisions are likely over the coming years. Its first year is designed to introduce you to ways of reading and thinking about literature and language and their relationship. The course as a whole also retains its traditional focus on work in all periods of English literature and language along with specialisation on chosen authors or subjects. Its combination of coverage and choice makes the Oxford English course especially distinctive.

At Oxford you have the benefit of being taught both in your college and in the Faculty of English. College teaching is the bedrock of the undergraduate experience at Oxford: your tutor will arrange a combination of classes and tutorials so that you benefit from discussing your ideas with your peers as well as in the tutorial situation. University lectures supplement and complement this work and are given in the

English Faculty, of which all undergraduates studying English are members. The Oxford English Faculty is the largest department of English in the country, and contains some of the leading critics and writers in the subject. You can attend lectures which develop your particular interests, and often have the opportunity to hear work in progress and new research.

Library and IT facilities are equally excellent. Students reading English have access to one of Britain's major libraries, the renowned Bodleian Library, and can borrow books from the English Faculty Library and their college libraries. The English Faculty has a computer room dedicated to student use, and all students have access to the University Computing Service and those computing facilities (often extensive) provided by their colleges. Students reading English are introduced to working with IT resources early in their undergraduate careers and are encouraged to use them. As a world-class research faculty, we subscribe to a range of online journals and database collections, many of which students can also access during vacations when they are away from Oxford.





## Elizabeth Humphreys

Second Year English (mature student)

I am a Mature Student at Harris Manchester, reading for a second undergraduate degree in English Literature. I completed my BSc in Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics which enabled me to go straight into the second year of this BA. Oxford feels entirely different from London. The work load is heavier, but much more independent. Something I hadn't anticipated was the insular nature of colleges. Life begins and ends at one's college, and for that reason choosing a college is crucial. Over and above this there are, of course, societies and social activities university wide - but life for the whole three years is centred around college. Oxford seems a small, friendly and very young place - so many familiar faces always around, no one is anonymous. The tutorial system complements this well - your tutors will know your work, style and interests extremely well - and their attention to your academic needs is excellent. The work is often extremely challenging and demanding, but a genuine interest in your subject will make everything rewarding. Above all, university here can be anything one wants it to be - smart or casual, sociable or esoteric, diverse or familiar. I have done many archetypal Oxford activities - rowing, balls, libraries, drama, but there are lots of more unusual opportunities too. The number of contact hours (lectures, tutorials and classes) each week means you'll have time to try all these out and more - just remember to pick up a book most days too!

# How is the course taught?

All parts of the English course are taught through a mixture of tutorials, classes, and lectures. During most of your undergraduate career you will be studying 1-2 papers a term, and will thus have 1-2 tutorials a week, supplemented by 1-2 college classes. You would also normally attend a number of lecture courses and university classes during the week in the English Faculty (a separate university building, which also houses the Faculty Library and computing facilities for English students).

Most colleges have between one and three tutors in English, who are Fellows of the college, along with additional lecturers who also teach for the college. These people will be your principal tutors during your three years at Oxford, though from time to time you are also likely to have tutorials with tutors at other colleges.

You normally have one tutor for one paper, and this means that the tutor gets to know you and your work well and is able to guide your progress through a paper. A tutorial generally involves you, another student and your tutor for the paper in question. A tutorial gives you the chance to explore, and clarify your ideas about the author or subject. Oxford places considerable emphasis on the production of regular written work, normally in the form of essays. This

ensures that you have brought your ideas on a subject to a point where you are able to express them cogently on paper. This kind of training is also excellent preparation for many of the kinds of careers available to you after university.

Your tutors may also give you some teaching in classes. Classes involve a larger number of students and provide the opportunity for more informal discussion of ideas or material contextual to the paper on which you are all working. There are also University-organised classes which take place in the English Faculty. This forum gives you the chance to receive teaching from tutors from other colleges, who will be holding classes on a subject in which they have a particular research interest. The Faculty is also where tutors give lectures, which form the most substantial area of teaching supplementary to the tutorial system.

In lectures you will hear new ways of considering subjects that you are studying. As with classes, tutors will be lecturing on subjects on which they have a particular expertise or area of research, and you will often encounter these ideas before they are published in book form. It is by going to lectures that you can get to hear the many Oxford lecturers whose names will be familiar to you from reading their books, but who may not be directly involved with your tutorial teaching.





# How is the course examined?

The course is examined through a combination of examinations and submitted written work. First-year work culminates in a set of examinations at the end of the year, in which each of the four papers you have studied is assessed through a two or three-hour written examination. You must pass all of these papers in order to pass the examination as a whole and to enter into the second year, but the marks that you get do not count towards your final examination result; effectively you start anew in the second year.

Of the second and third year papers most are assessed by three-hour examinations at the end of your third year. However, one second-year paper is examined by a portfolio of work on the history of the English Language, and two special author and special topic papers are examined by extended essays of 5-6000 words, written over two periods of three weeks earlier in the third year. You may also offer an additional optional thesis of a similar length to the extended essays. This means that submitted written work may comprise up to a third of your final assessment.



## Tiannah Viechweg

First Year English

Having come through a comprehensive education, I am currently a first year English student at St John's College. Although all English students do the same course, I soon found that different colleges have different teaching methods and at St John's they push us to the max. Doing English at St John's requires will, determination and patience as it is a huge step up from A Levels. This level of intensity, although it might seem daunting, is a huge motivational force as you discover you're capable of doing much more reading than you ever imagined possible. The reason why I chose to study at English at Oxford was because although I enjoyed studying English, my literary knowledge was extremely basic. Coming here and having some of the leading English academics for tutors, soon corrected this and boosted my own confidence as a student of English in the process.



## Sophie Evans

### First Year English

I've always loved English, and Oxford offers the best English course; that's why I applied. There's so much freedom - although you cover the whole span of English literature over the centuries, you choose your favourite authors and genres to write about. Oxford offers fantastic tutors and resources, as well as a great social life and good career prospects. Being amongst the brightest students in the world makes Oxford the most exciting place, and city life is great amidst such beautiful surroundings (although it's quite different to the Welsh mountains!). Many people think that Oxford is only for 'rich kids' or a certain stereotype, but that really isn't the case, and many people go through A Levels and do better than they expected, and then regret not ever applying. If you love English, you'll love Oxford, so apply!

# Can I study English with another subject?

You can study English at Oxford in combination with a modern language (the most popular are French, German, and Spanish), with History, or with Classics (Latin or Greek or both). The English and Modern Languages course is four years, including a year spent abroad in the country of your modern language; the History and English course is three years, and the Classics and English course is four years if you are starting the classical language from scratch, and three if you are not.

On each of these joint degrees you select some papers from those available in the courses of the two subjects you are studying. The Classics and English and History and English courses in particular are designed with 'bridge' or 'link' papers which enable connective work between the two subjects. All the courses are assessed through one set of examinations at the end of the first year, and a further set at the end of the final year; extended essay or thesis work may also constitute up to a third of the final assessment.

These courses suit best students who have an equal ability in and commitment to both subjects. Those in this position often do very well in these degrees. The number of students reading these joint courses is not as large as those doing English alone, and some colleges do not offer all the joint courses, so you should read the *Undergraduate Prospectus* with care to identify those colleges that have a particular commitment to the joint course that interests you.

Students applying for these joint degrees will generally include in their A levels, or equivalent qualifications, the two subjects they wish to study, except in the case of the four-year course in Classics and English, where you will learn a classical language in your first year.





## Can I do creative writing or drama?

Creative writing does not form an official part of studying English here, but Oxford's English Faculty has some of the country's leading poets among its lecturers. They, and Oxford's visiting Professor of Poetry, give regular lectures and workshops. If you already write, or want to start, Oxford has been a source of inspiration to writers in a range of genres, and a range of student-run events and publication opportunities mean that you can use your spare time as an undergraduate to develop your literary skills without the pressure of having them formally assessed.

Drama is, of course, a significant element in the English course. You could choose to study dramatic texts in many of your period papers in the first and second years, select a dramatist for your Special Author paper in the third year, and take Drama in English as your special option. There is also a whole paper devoted to Shakespeare. Oxford also has its own visiting professorship in drama, which is held in turn by directors, playwrights and actors – Alan Ayckbourn, Arthur Miller, Ian McKellan, and Diana Rigg have been among them. Performance is not a part of the degree course, although many of our students find their appreciation and understanding of dramatic works is developed through their involvement in student theatre in Oxford.

There is also a constant source of opportunities for creative writing and involvement in drama in the University as a whole. There are numerous student-run magazines and dramatic productions, as well as the chance to start up new enterprises!

# Would the English course suit me?

We believe that Oxford's combination of direction, choice, and personal attention gives it unique appeal. At the end of three years we hope you will have a wide but also deep knowledge of English literature and language, and that you will have specialised in the areas of this that you particularly enjoy.

At Oxford we are looking for students who would consider the prospect of reading a hundred books a year a pleasurable challenge. You will have to read a great deal while you are here! You need to be able to work independently as well as to respond to the guidance given by tutors. You must be prepared to work hard, and you should enjoy writing and want to develop your skills as a critic – you will have to produce a substantial amount of written work every term.

There is no 'standard' Oxford student. Every year we admit nearly 300 students from a wide variety of backgrounds.



## Rebecca Marsland

### Second Year English and Modern Languages

My name is Rebecca Marsland, I'm from Stockport in Greater Manchester and I'm studying English and German at St Hilda's College. I applied to Oxford at the suggestion of one of my sixth form teachers and have never looked back. I was attracted by the collegiate and tutorial systems and the fact that there is a lot of emphasis on independent learning. Most of the time you are given a reading list and are just expected to get it done. On the English side of the course, I would



## Sophie McDonnell

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### Second Year English

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usually have one tutorial (with essay) per week, and perhaps a fortnightly class. For German I also have a literature tutorial every week as well as translation and language classes. The work can be hectic sometimes and striking a balance between the two subjects can be difficult, but it is important to get involved in as many extra curricular activities as possible. This year I am Secretary (Vice President) of St Hilda's JCR, and have always been actively involved in college life, from organising elections to playing one half of the pantomime cow!

My name is Sophie McDonnell and I come from Newcastle upon Tyne. I went to St Thomas More Comprehensive and am now in my second year at Oxford reading Course II English. I am my college JCR Welfare Officer and a peer Supporter. When not working I enjoy playing the violin and saxophone and dancing in Oxford's cheesiest clubs! Course II is the alternative English course in which you choose to study in more

depth literature from the Anglo-Saxon period up to the beginning of the Renaissance. I chose to read English as I felt there was always more to it than reading literature; it involves research, analytical thought and an awareness of historical context. I chose Oxford as it has amazing research facilities (the Bodleian has literally millions of texts available to undergraduates), the best academics in their field to stimulate your analytical skills in the dreaded but rewarding tutorials, and is steeped in rich cultural history.



## What qualifications do I need?

Most students will have an A level in English literature or English Language and Literature. (Candidates offering English Language A level without English Literature are advised to contact their preferred college to discuss their situation before they apply before they apply).

A language or history are also helpful at A level, but in practice students come with a great variety of different A level subjects (including English Language). Many also come with other qualifications, including Scottish Highers or Advanced Highers (including English Literature or Language) and the International Baccalaureate (including English Literature).

The English tutors and the Tutor for Admissions at every college are always happy to answer queries if you need more information. You should consult the University *Undergraduate Prospectus* and our website, ([www.english.ox.ac.uk](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk)).

### Amir Feshareki

#### First Year English

English at Oxford will constantly surprise you. Even though the same course is offered in all colleges, there are no set texts after Shakespeare in the 2nd or 3rd year, leaving you to negotiate a path of study with both your own tutors, as well as tutors in other colleges dependent on their research specialisms. In my first term, I concentrated on such diverse topics as Zadie Smith, the Beowulf poet, and the films of Alfred Hitchcock in relation to Sylvia Plath.

At Mansfield, like any other college or hall, doing English requires a great deal of discipline, both in terms of your time management and commitment to study. English students largely construct their own timetables; there are usually one or two tutorials per week (one-on-one essay-based teaching), supplemented by a class that acts as a forum for discussion, and a handful of optional lectures. There is, then, the opportunity, as an English undergraduate, to get involved in all aspects of university life, be it the diverse range of sports, student journalism or drama.



# How do I apply?

You apply to Oxford through UCAS, as for any other university. The full information is contained in the University's *Undergraduate Prospectus*. Your school or college will have a copy, or you can obtain it direct from the University. It is also available on-line; details are given on p.20. The prospectus also contains information about different colleges; all colleges publish their own prospectuses too, which are either available direct from the college (addresses in the *Undergraduate Prospectus*) or available on-line (go to the main Oxford site, and then look under particular colleges).

To become a student at Oxford you need to be accepted by a particular college, though you apply through a central admissions system. If you don't know which college to name as your preference you can make an open application: details of this are also in the undergraduate prospectus. Offers of places are made at each college on the basis of your school or college record, samples of your work on English literature (or language and literature), your ELAT score an interview, and your past or future results in A levels (or whatever other exams you may be taking); more flexible criteria operate for mature students. Candidates are shortlisted for interview on the basis of their academic record and promise, as detailed in our selection criteria ([www.english.ox.ac.uk](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk)). Interviews take place in December. You may be interviewed in the course of the same visit by other colleges in addition to your first choice; this helps to ensure that the best applicants get into Oxford regardless of the strength of the competition at different colleges. We continue to work to refine our selection procedures, and our updated criteria and processes should be consulted on the website before you make an application. You will also need to sit the English Literature Admission Test (ELAT), for which separate registration is required. Details of this are also in the *Undergraduate Prospectus*.

You can read English as a single subject at any of the undergraduate colleges except Queen's, which accepts students only for the joint courses with English.

## Eric Roward

Second Year English

I've always loved reading, writing and talking about both language and literature, so my decision to study English at degree level was fairly natural. My A level English teacher encouraged me to make an application here, and after several persuasive chats, I decided to put Oxford on my UCAS form. That was one of the best decisions I've ever made!

The course here is really challenging, but probably unbeatable. I have the opportunity to study literature from 700 AD to the present day, using cutting edge resources such as the Bodleian library, and lectures by world-class academics. The tutorial system means that I've developed my own personal preference for how I study and my confidence has greatly increased. Studying English is hard work, because it involves an extensive (but manageable) amount of reading. That said, there's a huge amount of satisfaction in having an hour's discussion of a topic you're interested in with a leading expert.

As for life beyond my course (which is possible, by the way!), I'm involved with the Student Union's Target Schools campaign, which encourages people from state schools to apply to Oxford. Apart from that, I do lots of normal student socialising - going to the pub or to the Student Union club night, ice-skating, the cinema, chilling out in a cafe, etc. I've met a diverse range of people and have been challenged in ways that I wouldn't have thought possible a year ago. I couldn't recommend English at Oxford enough - have a go and apply!



# What I did after my Oxford degree: a selection



## **Philip Lavender**

Keble College, MPhil student

Having studied at Oxford as an undergraduate, my decision to stay on at graduate level was an easy one. After getting hooked by Old English in my first year, I took English Course II which included several medieval options and expanded my repertoire to Old Norse and Middle High German. I have always enjoyed studying and wanted to stay on in academia, heading for a DPhil and beyond. Oxford has amazing resources for anyone interested in medieval literature, from the astounding manuscript collection at the Bodleian (which I now get to peruse at will) to a top-class array of academics. I chose to take the MPhil course (which is two years rather than one) because I wanted to learn Latin, so I took classes alongside the core course components. The transition from undergraduate to graduate was fairly easy for me – there was much that was pleasantly familiar (like the library system) and yet plenty of fresh challenges which made it an exciting new stage of my university life.

## Abigail Anderson

Mansfield College, Theater Director

I chose to study English because it was the only subject which would involve spending time working on Shakespeare, and, at the time, my two passions were the plays of Shakespeare and archaeology. Now only one of those passions remains (archaeology was just too muddy!) and I am pleased to say that I get to spend a lot of my professional life continuing to work on Shakespeare – as a theatre director rather than an academic. The English course at Oxford is fantastically open, you are encouraged to discover what your own passions are, rather than being told “this book/poem/play is important and this is what your opinion of it should be”. At every point in the course I was challenged to invent my own agenda and have confidence in my independent analysis of a text. The tutorial system quickly taught me to think on my feet and to communicate my ideas succinctly and clearly. The wide-ranging nature of the syllabus not only enabled me to develop my own interests (an optional thesis on “Directing Hamlet”, for example, neatly killed two birds with one stone) but gave me an invaluable sense of the context of literature and where everything fits in. And, as a final point, rather cheekily, I should say that studying English was also the perfect choice for me because the flexibility of the timetable gave me lots of time for rehearsing!



## Ursula Errington

Pembroke College, News Correspondent

I applied to read English at Oxford when I was 18 because I could think of nothing better than spending three years engrossed in a subject about which I was passionate. At 27, I use the practical, solid skills that my degree gave me on a daily basis.

Studying English at Oxford required me to learn to analyse, critique and research a huge volume of material and have the luxury of discussing my ideas with some of the world’s leading lecturers on the subject. And it was the practical skills that I learnt on the course that have helped me most. Absorbing information, prioritising and learning to put across my own take on a subject in an accurate and interesting way, is vital in a newsroom. When deadlines loom and the pressure is on, knowing that you have the basic skills to get it right gives you huge confidence.

## How should I prepare for an interview?

The aim of the interview is to find out whether you have the potential to enjoy and do well in an English degree course here. Entrance for English is highly competitive, and the interview gives us further evidence to help distinguish between equally well-qualified applicants. Tutors will wish to talk to you about your reading, and will be interested in what you read in addition to your A level (or other examination) syllabus texts, so it is a good idea to be doing some reading of this sort in the summer and the months before the interview period. It is possible that you will be given a piece of poetry or prose to discuss in the interview. There are no 'right' answers that you need to give to secure a place, and it is intended to be a stimulating, friendly and exploratory exercise.

## Open Days

If you possibly can, it really is a good idea to visit Oxford in advance of your application, in order to get a sense of the place and to inspect possible colleges to which you might apply. All colleges hold open days during the course of the year. Details of these are generally available on the college's web-page or may be obtained from the Admissions office at each college. The Faculty of English holds 2 open day a year. Details may be obtained from the Faculty Office, the address of which is given overleaf.





The University Undergraduate Prospectus and details on admissions may be obtained from:

The Oxford Colleges,  
Admissions Office,  
Wellington Square,  
Oxford, OX1 2JD.  
Tel: 01865 270207

For information on the English Faculty and open days contact:

The English Faculty Office,  
St Cross Building,  
Manor Road,  
Oxford, OX1 3UQ.  
Tel: 01865 271055  
Fax: 01865 271054

e-mail:  
[undergraduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:undergraduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk)

See also the English Faculty website at:  
<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk>

Website (main address):  
<http://www.ox.ac.uk>

(admissions):  
<http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk>







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