

What do universities want?

Admissions officers around the world share their advice on what makes a good applicant



“Students who have taken Cambridge International A Levels do very well at our campus”
- Stuart Schmill, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) website compares its courses to “a very interesting, fairly rugged mountain” and says that it wants people who have “the training, stamina and passion for the climb”. The University of Cambridge website says that it is looking for students with academic ability, motivation and enthusiasm for a course.

We talked to admissions officers about the qualities that they look for in their prospective students and how Cambridge qualifications prepare students for higher education.

GREAT RESULTS

Firstly, universities are looking for students with the academic ability to complete the course. Richard Partington is the Senior Tutor at Churchill College, University of Cambridge. He says:

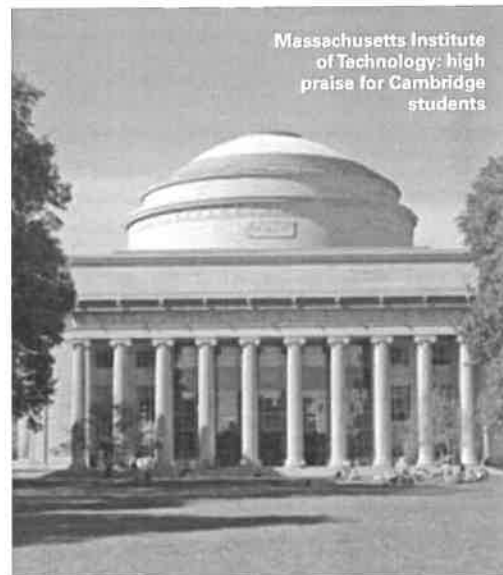
“In the end you cannot get away from examination results. My advice to all learners, international learners among them, is work as hard as you can at school and get the best results you can.”

SUBJECT UNDERSTANDING

Universities are looking for students who can demonstrate that they already have a deep understanding of their subject. These students will be able to hit the ground running at the start of their degree, and will be well equipped to understand the new ideas and concepts introduced at degree level. MIT is a world-class educational institution, specialising in science and technology. Stuart Schmill, Dean of



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Massachusetts Institute of Technology: high praise for Cambridge students



ULink College students find out what universities want

Admissions, says: "Students who have taken Cambridge International A Levels do very well at our campus. One of the things we find is that they have a real depth of understanding of the subject matter that they have had classes in, and a real engagement with it."

This depth of understanding is at the heart of our recently refreshed Cambridge International A Levels. We worked closely with university lecturers and admissions officers to identify key concepts – the underlying principles of each subject.

When learners understand these key concepts they are able to use them to solve problems and to understand new aspects of the subject.

Admissions officers are also looking for evidence of the skills that undergraduates will need to cope with the rigours of university work. Roseanna Cross is Head of Undergraduate Admissions at the University of



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Bristol, one of the best universities in the UK. She says: "Cambridge qualifications are excellent because they allow students to develop lots of transferable skills, things like independent learning skills and research skills and problem-solving skills – these things are really important for when you are studying at university."

A GENUINE INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT

Finally, universities are looking for motivated and passionate students – students with the enthusiasm to sustain them through three or more years of study at university.

Richard Partington of Churchill College stresses how important it is for students to have a real interest in a subject. "The critical thing is that students apply for something that they are genuinely interested in," he says. "And that's the student, not mum or dad, not social expectation of the society in which they live."

Philip Ballinger, Associate Vice-Provost for Enrollment and Admissions at the University of Washington, USA, the state's flagship institution, says that they are looking for students who love to learn: "These students are willing to be challenged, willing to dive into new things, and often more able to synthesise what they have learned. The Cambridge approach fosters such students, such learning, and such results." ♣

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- Philip Ballinger, University of Washington

Need-to-know Cambridge International AS & A Levels:

- are taken by more than 175 000 learners in around 125 countries every year and are available in a choice of 55 different subjects
- are regarded as a passport to success in education, university and employment
- help students develop a deep understanding of subjects, as well as independent learning and constructive thinking skills which are so important to universities.



More advice

Find out more and download our Cambridge Advanced brochure at www.cie.org.uk/cambridgeadvanced

Key concepts

When we refreshed our most popular Cambridge International AS & A Level syllabuses, we worked with universities to identify the key concepts of each subject. Understanding these underlying principles helps learners develop the deep subject knowledge that universities are looking for.

Example of key concepts:
Cambridge International AS & A Level Biology

- Cells as the units of life
- Biochemical process
- DNA
- Natural selection
- Observations and experiment
- Organisms in their environment