Dr Kirsty Hughes: Applying to Cambridge

Hello. So I have been sent to talk to you about the admissions process. I’m Dr Kirsty Hughes. I’m a lecturer here in public law, particularly human rights and privacy, but I’m also the admissions tutor at Clare College and what I’m going to do today is I’m going to go through a sort of overview of the admissions process and explain in particular the role that the admissions tutor has in that process. I’m going to do this quite quickly because we don’t have very much time and I want to leave as much time as possible for you to ask questions, because that’s usually the more useful part of the session. So the admissions process obviously starts in the autumn and you have to get your UCAS form in by 15th October. Shortly after that you will be asked to fill in what we call the supplementary questionnaire. The supplementary questionnaire isn’t anything that you need to worry about. It’s an opportunity for you to say a little bit more about why you want to apply for Cambridge and primarily it’s a form in which we ask those of you that are doing A levels to provide details of your AS module scores. That needs to be submitted quite quickly after 15th October. You have about a week to turn that around. It’s not onerous in any way but you just do need to be aware that you will need to fill in the supplementary questionnaire.

What happens then is that your applications will go to the admissions tutor of whichever college you have chosen to apply to or, if you’ve applied for a sort of open place and you haven’t specified a college, then the university admissions office will send your application to a particular college. At that point when the applications come in they’re all treated the same regardless of whether you applied to that particular college or whether it was an open application and what happens is the admissions tutor examines the application and decides whether or not to call you for interview. And we usually interview about 90 to 95 percent of all applicants. We’ll usually interview, if you’re doing A levels, somebody who we think looks on track to achieve at least our standard offer and our standard offer is an A star and two As. One indication of that will be if you have one AS score which is 90 percent or above and the other AS scores are 80 percent or above, but many applicants will have AS module scores of far higher than that.

So from your perspective what happens then is if you’re called to interview you’ll receive a letter probably towards the start to middle of November and the interviews will be held early December. You then come to Cambridge for the interview in December and you may have one or two interviews, usually with law fellows in that particular college, and I can explain a little bit about the way we do the interviews in my own college, which is Clare College, and I would imagine other colleges are broadly similar although you should check on their websites as well. So what we do when I interview is we give the applicant a little scenario and a number of different variations on that scenario, perhaps with some rules. You don’t need to know anything about this particular area of law. In fact, if you have done law before we’ll usually make sure that we do an area of law which you haven’t covered, so you don’t need to know anything about this particular issue. What we’re looking for is to see how you can reason with the material that you’ve given, how you can understand and apply the rules that we provide you with, and it’ll be similar to the sort of things that you’ve probably been doing this morning.
Then usually what happens is you’ll also be asked to do a law test and the law test that we do at Clare is a similar sort of principle. Again, you’re not required to have any specific legal knowledge, you’ll be given all of the material that you need and you’ll be asked to analyse text and various scenarios. What happens next is that the interviewers at the end of the interview period, they get together and they meet the admissions tutor and put forward the list of candidates that they would like to make offers to. The admissions tutor then has to look at the offers across all of the subjects that they’re responsible for and decide how many offers can be made for law. From your perspective, what happens next is in January you will receive a letter and one of three things can happen at this stage. Either you’ll be made an offer, which will be fantastic news; alternatively, they may decide at that point that they can no longer continue with your application so unfortunately at that stage your application will come to an end.

Or the third thing which can happen is that you could end up in what we call the “winter pool”, and the winter pool is a mechanism by which other colleges can consider your application. So if for example, you apply to Clare and we thought that you were very good but unfortunately you weren’t top of our list, but we thought other colleges may well still be interested in you, we will put you into the winter pool and you can be considered by the other colleges at that stage. If that happens it will take slightly longer, a few more weeks, but you may be made an offer by another college. You may also not be made an offer at that stage, in which case your application will then come to a close.

What happens after that is that you have to accept the offer and then obviously you have to meet the terms of the offer, and the terms of the offer are usually an A star and two As for A level, or 40 and 776 in the Highers for those that are taking the IB. But we also have applicants applying from all sorts of other countries. We also have people who are doing Scottish Highers, we have people doing Irish qualifications and we can work out an appropriate qualification for each of those examination systems as well.

In the summer when you get your results, hopefully you will have major offer, in which case you will come to Cambridge in the October, or if you applied for deferred entry, the following year. If you haven’t made your offer then in August when all of the A level results come out and the admissions tutor will then have access to all of the results at IB which come earlier and then A levels, then we get together and the admissions tutor looks at whether it’s possible to still allow you to come to Cambridge having not made your off and whether that is possible depends on a number of things. It depends on how much you’ve missed your offer by, whether there’s any reasons for why you’ve missed your offer and it also depends on whether we have any places left, because each college makes slightly more offers than we actually have places because we know that we lose people at that stage. So the admissions tutor will take those things into account and they will then decide whether or not to allow you to come to Cambridge anyway. So that’s the timescale of the admissions process.

One or two other things. So I mentioned deferred entry; if you want to apply for deferred entry, that’s absolutely fine, we get applicants applying for deferred entry every year. The only sort of crucial thing is that you must make that clear at the time at which you make your application. It’s not usually possible to defer your entry after the offer’s already been made because at that point we’ll have already decided our numbers for that year. But if you say that from the outset, then
that’s usually fine to apply for deferred entry. The other thing to bear in mind is that if you are applying with A levels and you have not got AS module marks, then the offer set might be slightly higher to reflect the fact that we don’t have as much information about your academic background, in which case that would probably be two A stars and one A. But I’m going to open it up to questions now, so any questions?