

ECONOMICS AT CAMBRIDGE A

Guide for Prospective Applicants

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This guide has been prepared by the Faculty of Economics to provide useful information for prospective applicants who wish to pursue the three-year BA Honours course in Economics at the University of Cambridge. In this guide you will find answers to many of the questions which applicants frequently ask during the initial phase of the application process. It aims to help you understand what A-level or other qualifications you should have in order to stand a good chance of success when you apply, and how the applications procedure works. It also gives a broad outline of the undergraduate Economics course at Cambridge. Additional information is available at www.econ.cam.ac.uk/ba/index.html.

Although some questions below regarding entry qualifications focus on applicants studying at UK schools, if you are studying elsewhere you can find information about entry requirements at www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international-students/entrance-requirements.

What A-level courses are required?

The Faculty of Economics requires A-level Mathematics or equivalent (e.g. IB Higher Level Mathematics). If you do not satisfy this entry requirement, you should apply elsewhere or consider an alternative subject (such as Land Economy or Human, Social, and Political Sciences in Cambridge). Further Mathematics is not a formal requirement, but it is very useful if you have taken it at AS or A level.

The Faculty does not have requirements for subjects other than Mathematics. In particular, A-level Economics is not a prerequisite, although it is useful. The Faculty recognizes that it may not always be possible for students to take their preferred combination of subjects, usually because their school does not offer the subject concerned. If you are unable to take your preferred subjects at A level, you should explain the reasons for this in your application.

In addition to Mathematics, any two ‘academic’ A-level subjects could be acceptable. Note that the Faculty does not recommend A-level Business Studies as a preparation for the Cambridge Economics course, although you may consider taking it if A-level Economics is not available. If your school does not offer Economics, you could consider taking A-level Geography or History instead.

What will I be expected to know before starting the course?

The course does not presume prior knowledge of Economics. However, familiarity with its terminology and basic principles (as covered in A-level Economics) is an advantage; otherwise, you will need to learn this material very quickly to reach a standard well above A-level by the end of the first year.

The Economics course in Cambridge assumes that you are very proficient in Mathematics. You are presumed to have fully mastered the material in the core modules (C1-C4) from the A-level Mathematics syllabus before starting the course. The compulsory first-year course in Quantitative Methods (which covers Mathematics and Statistics) builds on this and you will be better prepared for it if you have taken the A-level Mathematics statistics module (S1).

If you are taking extra Mathematics modules as part of a Further Mathematics course, you will benefit from focusing on Pure Mathematics and Statistics (rather than Mechanics or Decision Mathematics).

What sort of GCSE and AS grades should I have before applying?

There are around 7 applicants for every entering student, so the competition for admission in Economics at Cambridge is strong. In previous years, the typical successful applicant had at least 6 A* grades at GCSE and high A grades for AS level Mathematics and Economics (with average scores of at least 90%), and was taking 4 subjects at A level, including Further Mathematics.

If you are offered a place at Cambridge, this will usually be conditional on your achieving grades of at least A*A*A in your A-levels with an A* for Mathematics (or 776 at Higher Level for IB with a 7 for Mathematics), although offers may differ depending on the College you apply to.

What will I study at Cambridge?

The Cambridge undergraduate course (also called ‘Tripos’) in Economics consists of three separate parts, one corresponding to each year of study. The first year provides a general introduction to Economics and some closely related subjects; the second and third year are more advanced, and offer students an opportunity to specialise.

In the first year of the Economics Tripos (Part I) all students study five subjects (also called ‘papers’): Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Quantitative Methods (Mathematics and Statistics), Political and Social Aspects of Economics, and British Economic History.

In the second year of the Tripos (Part IIA) all students take three compulsory subjects: Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Econometrics (the application of statistical methods to economic data). In addition, students choose one optional paper from among the following: International Trade & Economic Development, Labour, History & Philosophy of Economics, Mathematics & Statistics, International Relations, Politics or Sociology.

In the third and final year of the Tripos (Part IIB) all students take two compulsory subjects, Microeconomics and Macroeconomics, and choose two optional papers from a wide range of specialist subjects which are offered each year. In addition, all third-year students must also write a 7,500 word dissertation on an economic topic of their own choice.

You can find detailed outlines giving the content of the papers in each year of the Tripos online at www.econ.cam.ac.uk/ba/outlines.html.

Please note that the outlines on the website relate to the current academic year, and that they may therefore have changed by the time that you start your studies at Cambridge.

What sort of teaching will I get?

There are two main components to teaching at Cambridge:

- The Economics Faculty organises lecture courses for each paper, with most papers having a total of about 40 hours of lectures in total.
- The Director of Studies in your College is responsible for organising the small-group teaching, called ‘supervisions’, that supplements the lectures, with about 10 hours of supervision per paper. During these typically highly interactive supervisions, your supervisor covers the supervision assignment (consisting of problems and/or essays), gives feedback on the supervision work you turned in, and answers any questions you may have about the material.

What difference does my choice of College make?

The lectures and Tripos examinations are the same for all students, regardless of their College. Furthermore, the Faculty provides supervision assignments so that all students in principle have the same educational opportunities. Although each College is different and has its own ambience, all students experience a highly stimulating and enriching environment in Cambridge.

What exams will I have to do to graduate?

The examinations are organised by the University and held at the end of each academic year (in late May or early June). They consist of one 3-hour written exam for each paper you have taken that year, except for the compulsory Part IIA paper in Econometrics which is a 2-hour paper, and a project.

Note that there are no intermediate examinations at the end of individual lecture courses. In addition, your performance in College supervisions and supervision assignments does not count towards your marks in the Tripos examinations. Last but not least, there are no re-sits in the Economics Tripos.

How does the system of classing exams work?

A class is awarded for each year of the Economics Tripos and it is based entirely on your performance in that year's University examinations; so, there is no accumulation of marks across years.

The transcript issued by the University provides details of your performance in all three years.

What happens if I would like to switch from Economics to another subject?

It is possible to switch to another subject after one or two years, for instance to History, Law or Human, Social, and Political Sciences. There is also a possibility to switch to Management Studies after the second or third year, although entry to this is competitive due to a limited number of places. In all cases, you will need your College's agreement to switch to another subject.

What are the career opportunities for Cambridge Economics graduates?

Cambridge Economics graduates tend to be in high demand and the skills they have acquired in the intensive and analytically demanding Economics Tripos are very useful for a wide range of careers. Many students find work in the financial sector (e.g. asset management or investment banking) or in management consultancy. There are also interesting opportunities in the public sector (e.g. Bank of England or Government Economic Service).

Some careers require further study for a professional qualification (e.g. in accountancy). Many economic careers require a Master's degree, for which the Economics Tripos at Cambridge provides an excellent preparation.

How do I apply?

You apply online at www.ucas.com by 15 October using the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). You also have to submit the Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ) for Cambridge. Applicants studying outside the European Union also have to submit the Cambridge Online Preliminary Application (COPA). You specify your preferred College in your application or submit an 'open' application which will be randomly allocated to one of the Colleges. Your College (not the Economics Faculty) processes your application and conducts the interviews.

All applicants are required to take the pre-interview written assessment in Economics organised by the Admissions Testing Service (www.admissionstesting.org) on 2 November 2017 at a local authorised centre (which is likely to be your school/college), which has to register you by 15 October 2017. The two-hour Economics admissions assessment has two sections:

- (i) Problem solving and advanced mathematics multiple-choice questions (80 minutes).
- (ii) An extended essay responding to an excerpt of text (40 minutes).

Detailed information about the contents of the Economics admissions assessment is available at www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/eca_specification.pdf

Further information about the applications process for Cambridge is available at www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying or, for overseas applicants, at www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international-students.

Note if you are already studying at another University: The University of Cambridge will not allow credit transfer for undergraduate study elsewhere in the UK or abroad (except through the established arrangements for Affiliated students who have completed a full undergraduate degree). Colleges do not normally accept students for the three-year undergraduate course if they have already taken up a place to study at another UK university; in particular, students who are already studying Economics elsewhere are unlikely to be considered.