History and Modern Languages

The joint degree in History and Modern Languages combines the best of both subjects. It offers the opportunity to develop near native-speaker skills in a foreign language while studying a range of papers relating to the culture and history of the relevant language area; options in some languages also include film and contemporary politics. Students will also develop analytical skills in History through a wide range of topics in British, European, American and World history, as well as the history of political thought. There will be opportunities to work with historical sources in foreign languages. As for other language students, those who take this course will spend their third year studying or working abroad, thereby immersing themselves in the language, culture, history and politics of a foreign country.

For 2020 entry, the languages available for study will be:

- French (post A-Level)
- German (from scratch or post-A Level)
- Spanish (from scratch or post-A Level)
- Italian (from scratch or post-A Level)
- Portuguese (from scratch)
- Russian (from scratch or post-A Level)

Both faculties are regarded worldwide as leaders in their respective fields. The History Faculty is one of the largest in the United Kingdom and is consistently ranked as the best in research and teaching assessments. It has internationally recognised experts in all relevant fields of study. The Modern Languages Faculty is the largest in the United Kingdom and also consistently rated as one of the best. It offers an unrivalled range of courses taught by leading scholars. The library resources in Cambridge, which support teaching and research in both Faculties, are world-class; the University also has extensive collections of films in all relevant languages.

Course requirements

Applicants will have a variety of relevant examination qualifications, though not necessarily in both languages and history; they will be expected to demonstrate an interest in both subjects and will be assessed on their potential to succeed in them.

Strong applicants will probably have studied some period of history to A level or equivalent; however A level History is not a requirement. One or more essay-based subjects are desirable, particularly if they have looked at topics from a historical perspective. You will be required to have studied the relevant language to A level or equivalent unless you wish to study it ab initio (from scratch). If you wish to study an ab
initio language, we would like to see some evidence of language ability (e.g. a modern or classical language to A level or equivalent).

The application process

As this is a course combining History and Modern Languages, candidates will share parts of their assessment with applicants for History and other parts with applicants for Modern and Medieval Languages.

We ask applicants in History and Modern Languages to send us three examples of recent written work, which may be discussed at interview. Two of the essays should be on historical topics, and one should be in the language you intend to study. Candidates applying for History with an ab initio language should only send two essays on historical topics. Where particular difficulties exist, we are always able to suggest other kinds of work which may help us in our assessment.

In the past, all applicants for History & Modern Languages have been asked to sit a History written assessment. These form part of our evaluation of candidates’ abilities and potential. Due to the ongoing pandemic, arrangements for this year’s written assessment remain under review. Information will be added to the College website later in the year.

In addition, applicants for a post-A level language will sit the short at-interview assessment, taken in College by all applicants to the Modern and Medieval Languages course, based on a short text in English that we will supply. For post-A level language candidates, this hour-long assessment is designed to assess writing skills in a foreign language, the ability to understand an intellectual argument, and to write in English. For applicants to study a language from scratch, the hour-long assessment will assess aptitude for language learning, the ability to understand an intellectual argument and writing in English. No special preparation or prior knowledge is required.

Candidates should expect at least two interviews, at least one for History (perhaps with a short text to consider beforehand) and one for the target language (usually with a short text to consider beforehand). Candidates should be prepared to discuss their relevant interests and potential directions they may wish to follow.

Typical conditional offers

Our typical conditional offer for History and Modern Languages will be A*AA at A level. IB offers are usually for a minimum of 40-42 points, to include 776 or 777 at Higher level in relevant subjects. Offers are designed to be realistic, taking into account individual circumstances, and to reflect potential and likely levels of achievement. Most of those who receive offers will attain the grades required.