

Music Admissions (further details)

At Girton, we assess each applicant on individual merit. We aim to select the brightest and best students from the applicants available to us, irrespective of social, racial, religious, school or (for Home/EU applicants) financial background, and we interview all applicants whom we judge to have a realistic chance of being offered a place at Cambridge, either at Girton or at another college.

In making our admissions decisions we take into account all the information available to us, including GCSE results (in the context of average achievement at the candidate's school); AS module scores; school reference; A-level grade predictions; personal statement; any difficult circumstances; submitted written work; tests taken at interview; and performance at interview. We are also able to compare Girton applicants with the gathered field of applicants in each subject across the University.

It is important to stress that candidates who are ultimately successful in gaining a place are unlikely to be equally proficient in all the skills in which they are tested. In fact, it is rare to find an individual who meets all the criteria [listed](#). No application succeeds or fails on one criterion alone.

The assessment process

Applicants to read Music at Girton are normally required to supply with their application some samples of recent school work. This should take the form of both words and music: typically a recent school essay (not necessarily in Music), and some compositions or harmony exercises (or both). All the work should be submitted in photocopied form (to avoid work going astray in the post); the work should contain teachers' comments.

Assessment will usually take place in early December. Generally, the assessment begins with a short written test. The purpose of this test is to determine the current state of candidates' musical training; it is not designed to highlight shortcomings, as we are very aware that preparation in schools varies hugely, and that many talented applicants have not had access to thorough training while at school. In the course of this test, candidates will be asked to write a short essay on an unseen; the latter is usually a piece of keyboard music. There is no pre-determined agenda to this particular exercise: candidates can address any aspects of the music that interest them, including form, melody, harmony, genre, style, or any other relevant parameter. The assessment process usually also involves some straightforward ear tests (typically identifying chords, writing down a simple diatonic melody and/or taking down by dictation all or part of a section in four-part harmony). The test usually concludes with a short harmony exercise (typically a chorale phrase for which candidates are asked to provide an indication of suitable harmonies). All these tests are usually discussed in the main interview, where we endeavour to see where candidates have a secure technical background and where they need some assistance. As suggested above, the primary purpose of the assessment is diagnostic.

Interviews

In addition to the test, applicants to read Music at Girton are required to attend two interviews. One (lasting about 45 minutes) will normally be with the Director of Music and one other interviewer with special interests in the subject; the other (lasting about 15-20 minutes) will normally be with two non-specialist interviewers.

In the main interview, applicants will be asked to discuss work that they have undertaken at school – this might include the submitted work – and to discuss interests that go beyond school work. The latter might include discussion of works performed by the applicant, or discussion of repertoire that is of particular interest to the applicant. Applicants will usually also be given some short extracts from the Western canon to discuss. The purpose of such discussions is, in part, to assess the suitability of applicants for supervision-style teaching. While a broad knowledge of repertoire can never be a disadvantage, it is not expected that candidates will necessarily know the unseens; rather, they will be expected to respond to questions and suggestions from the interviewers. In the course of the interview, candidates may also be given a short test of keyboard harmony; this will normally involve the harmonisation of a very straightforward melody. There is no need for concern if you are inexperienced at this type of exercise, as harmony and counterpoint can be taught from scratch to those who have not covered the ground in their sixth-form work. Finally, applicants will be offered the opportunity to perform briefly on their main instrument. In practice, this option is not often taken up by many applicants, and there is certainly no requirement that candidates perform at the time of their interviews.

The second interview is usually given over to more general matters. Candidates may be asked about achievements highlighted in their personal statement; they may be required to discuss current affairs or books they have recently read; they may also be asked about their musical interests. In general, there is no particular pattern to these so-called ‘tutorial’ interviews. They are intended to give candidates the chance to reveal a more rounded picture of their abilities than is sometimes possible in the specialist subject interview.

Decisions

For details of decisions and how you will hear the result see the [main admissions pages](#).

The Director of Studies in Music can be contacted by email via admissions@girton.cam.ac.uk. Please also use this address for any general admissions enquiries.