Report on the 2025 Physics & Philosophy admissions exercise

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1 Overall numbers

The number of applications for P&P remains stable, at about 10% of the total cohort. In the 2025, there were 171 applications for P&P from a total of 1637 applications. The fraction for recent years is given in Table 1.

Table 1: P&P applications as a percentage of the total

	2025	**2024**	**2023**	**2022**	**2021**	**2020**	**2019**
Total number of applicants	1637	1790	1672	1633	1785	1805	1828
Number of P&P applicants	171	174	152	140	180	173	184
Percentage	10.4%	9.7%	9.1%	8.6%	10.1%	9.6%	10.1%

Of the 171 applicants for P&P, 38 (22.2%) were shortlisted. 13 applicants (7.6%) received an offer of a P&P place; 2 applicants (1.2%) received an offer for a single-honours physics place. So, 8.8% of P&P applicants received an offer of some kind. The corresponding percentages for single-honours physics were 29.3% (430/1466) and 13.0% (191/1466) respectively.

The shortlisting and offer success rates of P&P applicants were (as usual) slightly lower than those of applicants for single-honours physics. The cause is that the P&P cohort performs on average less well in the PAT. This impacts primarily at the shortlisting stage. This year the success rate post-shortlisting was also slightly lower for P&P as compared with single-honours physics: 39.5% (15/38) for P&P compared to 44.4% (191/430) for P.

Key figures that allow a comparison of the P&P and P cohorts are summarised in Table 2. It should be noted that the period in question covers the COVID pandemic and subsequent years when contextual GCSE data were not available, which explains some of the year-to-year variations. During this period there were corresponding variations in shortlisting protocols. The column "above PAT/R cutoff" records the fraction of applicants performing sufficiently well to be automatically shortlisted *independently of contextual data*. This year, the PAT threshold for automatic shortlisting was 73.5%.

Table 3 records P&P application and offer numbers over a slightly longer timescale. It shows that they have been broadly stable.

The number of P&P places declared across all colleges at the start of the admissions process was 23, i.e. one more than last year. (SEH increased their number from 1 to 2.) It should be noted that a total of 23 slightly underrepresents the maximum number

Table 2: Comparison of P&P and P cohorts

		shortlisted		**made an offer**		**above PAT/R cutoff**	
2025	P&P	38/171	22.2%	15/171	8.8%	13/171	7.6%
	P	430/1466	29.3%	191/1466	13.0%	239/1466	16.3%
2024	P&P	44/174	25.3%	18/174	10.3%	21/174	12.1%
	P	481/1616	29.8%	191/1616	11.8%	301/1616	18.6%
2023	P&P	42/152	27.6%	16/152	10.5%	19/152	12.5%
	P	494/1520	32.5%	183/1520	12.0%	327/1520	21.5%
2022	P&P	29/140	20.7%	15/140	10.7%	11/140	7.9%
	P	463/1493	31.0%	185/1493	12.4%	270/1493	18.1%
2021	P&P	35/180	19.4%	13/180	7.2%	19/180	10.6%
	P	440/1605	27.4%	199/1605	12.4%	241/1605	15.0%
2020	P&P	39/173	22.5%	15/173	8.7%		
	P	447/1632	27.4%	185/1632	11.3%		
2019	P&P	36/184	19.6%	13/184	7.1%		
	P	462/1644	28.1%	191/1644	11.6%		

Table 3: P&P cohorts over time

	2025	**2024**	**2023**	**2022**	**2021**	**2020**	**2019**	**2018**
applications	171	174	152	140	180	173	184	182
number shortlisted	38	44	42	29	35	39	36	57
offers	15	18	16	15	13	15	13	18
success rate	8.8%	10.3%	10.5%	10.7%	7.2%	8.7%	7.1%	9.9%
post-SL success rate	39.5%	40.9%	38.1%	51.7%	37.1%	38.5%	36.1%	31.6%

of available places. This is because some colleges that formally admit for P&P do not declare a place. Such a college might be open to admitting a P&P applicant but it is not assumed that the college will receive P&P applications.

Although the number of offers remains significantly below the notional number of places, the discrepancy is less acute than it was in the past, as Table 4 reveals.

Table 4: Some historical data on number of places for P&P

	2025	**2024**	**2023**	**2021**	**2017**	**2016**	**2015**	**2014**
number of places	23	22	22	24	30	30	32	28

2 Admissions Process

The selection process for P&P applicants is in several respects identical to that for single-honours physics applicants. Applicants for both courses are considered in a single gathered field at the shortlisting stage, with the same quantitative shortlisting criteria

applied to all applicants. Shortlisting target numbers are not set separately. Instead there is a single, overall target number based on the total number of declared places for both courses.

All shortlisted applicants receive two physics/mathematics interviews in their 'first-choice' college and one physics/mathematics interview in their assigned 'second-choice' college. P&P applicants additionally receive two philosophy interviews: one in their first-choice college and one in their second-choice college. (In some colleges the philosophy interviews take place in the same session as one of the physics/maths interviews.)

After interviews, P and P&P applicants are ranked as a single gathered field according to an updated R-score that combines the PAT, GCSEs and the physics/mathematics interview scores. This ranking is for guidance only. Philosophy interview scores are not included. They are recorded in the central physics admissions database and inform admitting tutors' decisions as additional pieces of data.

Shortlisted applicants who, on the basis of their philosophy interviews and other available data, are not judged to show a sufficient aptitude for philosophy to be made an offer for the joint degree may nonetheless receive an offer for single-honours physics. There were two such applicants in 2025.

The respects in which the admissions process for P&P differs from that for single-honours physics primarily concern measures that seek to concentrate candidates in a smaller group of colleges, in order to produce sizeable P&P clusters. Key to these measures is the recognition of some colleges as having a "strong declared interest" (SDI) in the joint degree. As recorded in the report on the 2017 P&P admissions process, a college qualifies as having a strong declared interest only if: (i) it declares two or more places; and (ii) it displays a long term commitment to taking more than one P&P candidate.

The specific measures to support clustering, as agreed following the report on the 2023 admissions process, are as follows.

1. Candidates who make open applications are assigned only to SDI colleges, on the basis of the numbers of P&P places declared by those colleges. This assignment is done by the University Admissions Office, at arms length from both the P&P Admissions Coordinator and the philosophy Admissions Coordinator.

2. Reallocation of shortlisted P&P applicants aims to achieve the following, in decreasing order of priority. (i) Each SDI college is allocated at least five P&P applicants. (ii) Each SDI college is allocated $2.5 \times n$ P&P applicants. (iii) Each college with a quota of at least two places is allocated $2.5 \times n$ P&P applicants. (In each case, n is the relevant college's number of declared places for P&P.) These priorities do not override the normal reallocation rules: an applicant is not exported from a college if the result would reduce that college's number of applicants to below $2.5 \times n$, and ring-fenced applicants are not reallocated. In the 2025 round, colleges were permitted to ring-fence $1.5 \times n$ P&P applicants.

3. Applicants whose first college (Col1) is a non-SDI colleges are assigned an SDI college as their second college (Col2). Col2 assignments are then made to ensure so far as possible the correct numbers of applicants at the following colleges, in decreasing order of priority: (i) SDI colleges; (ii) colleges with a quota of at least two that have at least one shortlisted applicant; (iii) other colleges with a quota of two.

4. Assignments of Col3 and Col4 are only to colleges with a quota of two or more.

5. A college may over-offer for P&P only if its doing so does not prevent a lower-ranked college from making its quota of two or more.

In 2025 the SDI colleges were BAL, BNC, MER, ORL, PBK, all of which have as a permanent post a tutorial fellow who teaches logic, philosophy of science and philosophy of physics. In the event, SEH was able to make offers to two candidates (neither of whom were interviewed at the college); given their long-term commitment to P&P, I recommend that they be considered an SDI college in the 2026 admissions round.

This year, the P&P ratio of shortlisted applicants to places (38/23, i.e. 1.7 : 1) as usual fell below the overall 2.5 : 1 target. The number of offers made was, as usual, below the number of notional places. These anomalies persists despite, and not because of, the measures taken to cluster P&P applicants in a smaller number of colleges. They arise due to the fact that not as many sufficiently competitive students apply for P&P as the colleges collectively would wish. The figures in the previous section suggest that close scrutiny by SDI colleges that are keen to fill their quotas helps to ensure that all competitive P&P applicants are offered a place.

3 Demographics

Table 5: Demographics

Category		**Applied**	**Shortlisted**	**Offer**
Gender	Woman	39.2%	42.1%	60%
	Man	55.6%	55.3%	33.3%
	AT/PNS	5.3%	2.6%	6.7%
Region	Home	58.7%	63.2%	46.7%
	EU	11.0%	5.3%	6.7%
	Overseas (non EU)	30.2%	31.6%	46.7%

"AT/PNS" abbreviates the UCAS categories "I use another term"/"prefer not to say".

4 Discussion

The admissions process for P&P continues to work well. Although there are fewer offers than nominal places, colleges with a strong declared interest (SDI) in P&P typically (though not always) manage to fill their declared places. This is made possible via steps that seek to concentrate candidates in SDI colleges while ensuring that an applicant's chance of admission to the university is not affected by their college choice.

At the previous year's final decisions meeting it was agreed that assignments of Col5 and Col6 should be discontinued. Col3–Col6 assignments play a potentially important role in helping to maintain the clustering of P&P students. That said, in this admissions round, there did not seem to be significant adverse consequences of restricting to Col3–Col4 assignments.

Since P&P admissions is so tightly integrated into the process for single-honours physics, the bulk of the work is done by those who run the physics admission process, with the

P&P Admissions Coordinator only involved in the aspects of the process unique to the joint degree. I would therefore like to record my sincere thanks to those responsible for the smooth running of the overall process, in particular, Martin Bureau and Carrie Leonard-McIntyre.