

King's Student Perspectives

MML: French and German

Hannah, 3rd year

MML at King's is really, really good. The course itself is great, and the college organises it very well and has a lot of resources in terms of books and films, but also in terms of staff.

What attracted you to the course?

I was originally attracted to Modern Languages at Cambridge because of the huge variety within the course; you can cover literature spanning a millenium, film,

philosophy, linguistics and history, not to mention the papers which you can "borrow" from other faculties, including Human Rights in the Middle East, Medieval Welsh and Latin American history. What you study is very much down to you; there is a lot of choice and scope to specialise. Although the course is geared towards literature, the language side of things is not neglected, especially in the first two years, and by fourth year you are fluent enough to be translating things like Dickens into your chosen language.

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What papers did you take?

In first year I did literature for both French and German (although the structure has changed now and first years do a mix of literature and linguistics). That covered literature from the medieval period up to the 21st century, which gave me a brilliant overview, and a chance to see what I might want to do in second year. I never thought I'd end up doing medieval literature and historical linguistics, but that's what I ended up doing, and they were both really, really interesting papers, especially the medieval French (Fr3), full of stories about knights in shining armour as well as women's writing, all from before 1300. We even got to go and look at manuscripts in one of the college libraries, which was incredible.

I also did Du5, an introduction to Dutch language and literature, which was probably my favourite paper. There are several languages that you can take from scratch, and doing Dutch really gave me a sense of achievement: while continuing with your other two languages, you learn another and go from being a total beginner to A level standard in an academic year, as well as reading several books - amazing!

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What was it like at the beginning?

When you arrive in Cambridge at the beginning of first year, there is so much going on that it isn't unusual to feel a bit lost - I know I struggled with my first essay. I had never written a

2000 word essay before, so I had nothing to compare my work to, and I didn't feel at all on top of the book it was about. But after a minor panic during the writing, the supervision was fine - we just built on what I'd written and my supervisor picked up on things I'd missed. It definitely takes some time to get to grips with your style and supervisors' expectations, but everyone is in the same boat, and there's the whole year to work it out, as none of the essays count towards your end of year mark.

About the teaching and workload

The idea is not to submit an essay that perfectly covers every point imaginable, but to build on your essay and further the points you made in dialogue with your supervisor.

Supervisions are excellent, if a scary prospect. They are much more relaxed than I expected them to be – as long as you do the work, they are enjoyable. The idea is not to submit an essay that perfectly covers every point imaginable, but to build on your essay and further the points you made in dialogue with your supervisor – who will usually know far more than you!

As well as supervisions (almost all of which happen in college in first year), you will have language and translation classes in the faculty, oral supervisions in college and lectures on your “scheduled papers” (i.e. options) in the faculty, which adds up to about 14 hours of contact time a week. You are expected to do more than twice that amount of your own work.

And the social life?

If you manage your time well, there is still plenty of time for extra-curricular things and a social life. It is a very manageable degree if you go about it the right way.

I have done a lot of sport in Cambridge, playing netball and football for King's and fencing for the university; I was captain of the fencing team in my second year and still had time to go on swaps (meals

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Annual Funday on the back lawn

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in hall at other Colleges) and hang out with college and course friends.

I would also recommend the Arts Picturehouse, which shows a reasonable number of foreign language films as well as independent cinema.

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Practical issues

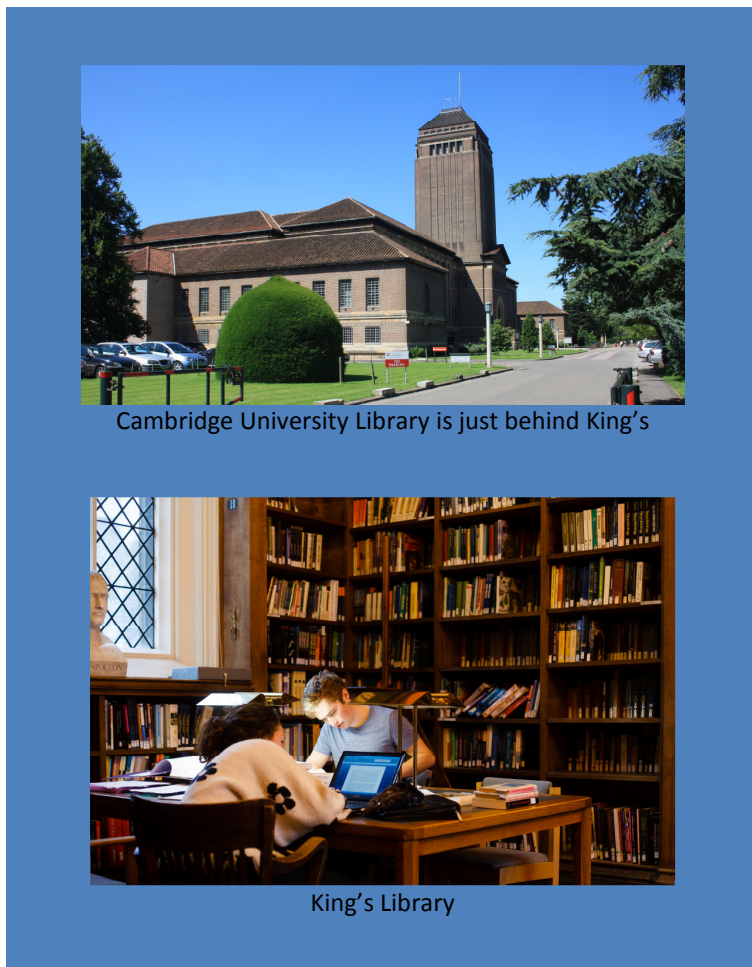
The MML department is on the Sidgwick Site, which is just over 5 minutes' walk from King's (even closer if you live in the Garden Hostels).

The MML library is incredibly well stocked and covers almost everything you will need for your whole degree; anything else is in the University Library.

King's library has pretty much everything you need for first year, and if there is something it does not have but you need, in most cases the librarians will buy the book in for you.

The Year Abroad

One of the best bits about MML is the Year Abroad in third year. There is incredible scope – you can do pretty much anything pretty much anywhere, as long as you are speaking the language and doing something vaguely useful. It is a chance to get out of what can become the Cambridge bubble and to experience another country and everything that comes with that, and to have a break from your degree – which often helps you to appreciate your final year all the more.



Cambridge University Library is just behind King's

King's Library

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During your Year Abroad there are three options: working as an assistant teacher through the British Council scheme, studying at a foreign university or working, which gives you huge amounts of freedom. I went to the south of France and studied for a year as well as doing an internship in Paris; one of my friends taught in Paraguay, one worked with a newspaper in Rome, another studied at a performing arts school in St Petersburg... You are free to do pretty much anything, as long as the faculty considers it appropriate.

While you're abroad, the only thing you have to do that counts for Cambridge is to prepare for your oral exam, which you do at the end of September (so just as fourth year starts), and to write a dissertation of 8000 words on your chosen subject, so there is plenty of time to throw yourself into your year.

What about the application process?

The application process is pretty painless. I would advise you to keep your personal statement as academic as you can, and demonstrate your passion for the subject. In terms of preparation, you don't need to read Madame Bovary four times or spend every summer in Italy from the age of three, you just need to be able to talk about what you have done – whether you've read some poetry, seen some films or followed the politics of the country concerned, you need to have something to say about it. Devoting some time to your languages and the cultures that go with them will also help you decide whether you really do want to spend four years doing exactly that.

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A note to current King's MML students:

If you would like to write about your experiences of studying MML at King's for our prospective students to read, please email Kristy in the Admissions Office for further details: undergraduate.admissions@kings.cam.ac.uk.

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