

The ECAA Guidebook

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General

What is the Economics Admissions Assessment?

The Economic Admissions Assessment (ECAA) is a pre-interview assessment for students applying to study Economics at the University of Cambridge.

What is the purpose of the ECAA?

The ECAA is designed to determine your potential to achieve as a student in a demanding undergraduate Economics course. It is therefore designed to test **how you think** rather than **what you know**. That being said, they are also testing your reasoning and mathematical knowledge and the way you apply it in unfamiliar contexts. It is crucial that you revise well and are confident in applying your Maths knowledge to do well in this assessment. It is designed to be difficult, even for the most able of students, in order to differentiate between students who have likely consistently achieved top grades.

Test Specifics

How is the ECAA structured?

The ECAA is composed of two sections lasting a total of 2 hours;

- Section 1: A multiple-choice assessment consisting of ROUGHLY 35 questions (do not be alarmed if there are more or fewer)
 - Approximately 20 will be Problem Solving (these are based on problem solving question in Section 1 of the Thinking Skills Assessment)
 - The remaining questions will be Advanced Mathematics questions

All questions in this section are multiple choice and of equal weighting. You will score 1 mark for every correct answer and not gain a mark for every

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incorrect or unanswered question. You have a total of 80 minutes for this section: it is recommended you split your time equally and spend 40 minutes on each section. Although there are fewer Mathematics questions, it is advised you spend 40 minutes on this section as they tend to be harder and will require you to spend a little bit more time on them.

- Section 2: Written response to a short excerpt of text (Economics based stimulus)
You will have a total of 40 minutes to complete this section.

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What is Problem Solving?

Problem solving involves looking at problems and finding creative and logical solutions within the given parameters. The questions are often numerical in nature or involve interpreting charts, diagrams or shapes. There are 3 key Problem Solving Skills that ECAA questions will focus on. These are:

- Relevant Section: requires you to analyse information to get a solution
- Finding Procedures: involves manipulating relevant information to get a solution
- Identifying Similarities: involves finding a situation with similarities to the one you were given.

For in-depth tutorials on how to tackle these types of questions, you can access a large number of FREE revision videos at: stepmaths.co.uk/free-ecaa

Do I need to know subject specific content to sit the ECAA?

No. Section 1 is not on Economic topics. While Section 2 is Economics-based, you are not assumed to have in-depth background knowledge on any specific subject area, such as specific techniques of economic analysis or information about the economy of any specific country. They are looking for how you interpret the text presented and link it to ideas you have previously encountered. That being said, they are expecting you to have a broad idea of key Economic themes and to be able to apply your own knowledge in unfamiliar contexts where appropriate.

Will there be a choice of question in Section 2?

No. You will be presented with one text and one question which you must answer.

How should I structure my Section 2 answer?

There is no set structure for how to answer this question; the only guideline is that you stick to the topic of the question but explore it from as many avenues as possible. Given that you have 40 minutes to write this essay, it is recommended that

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you spend a few minutes making sure you fully understand the excerpt provided and have written a quick plan to ensure you stay on topic and provide a clear, coherent argument throughout your essay.

Our Economics tutors (all of whom have passed the ECAA) have provided sample essay plans to help you with structuring your essay. To download a FREE essay plan visit: stepmaths.co.uk/free-ecaa

What is the mark scheme for Section 2 of the ECAA?

There is no formal mark scheme for this essay section of the ECAA and the exam board has not created model or ideal answers.

Luckily for you, we have created a number of essay plans on our website to help you write a well-reasoned response. To download a FREE essay plan tutorial, visit: stepmaths.co.uk/free-ecaa

Examiners will consider how well you have understood the topic of economic interest and how you have incorporated your own ideas into it. You will also be assessed on your written communication and English.

Will I struggle with the ECAA if I didn't take Further Maths A-Level?

Not necessarily, but possibly. A-Level Maths is a requirement to apply for Economics and AS Further Maths is required by some colleges and recommended by many. The topics in the Advanced Mathematics Section reflect those found in the A-Level Maths (not Further Maths) syllabus. Therefore, Further Maths is not necessary. However, the extra study it involves is undoubtedly helpful when tackling the Maths section of the ECAA. If you do not take Further Maths, it is essential you have a very strong understanding of A-Level content prior to taking the test.

The topics you need to know to sit the ECAA include:

- Algebra: Indices, Surds, Quadratics, Simultaneous Equations, Inequalities, and Algebraic Manipulation.
- Sequences and Series: Arithmetic and Geometric Series, Binomial Expansion, and Recurrence Relations.
- Coordinate Geometry: Equations of a Straight Line and of a Circle
- Trigonometry: Sine and Cosine Rule, Area of a Triangle using Sine, Sine Cosine and Tangent functions (including Graphs, Symmetries and Periodicity), Basic Trigonometric Identities.
- Exponentials and Logarithms: Log Laws, Solutions to Equations with Unknown Indices.
- Differentiation: Tangent/Normal Equations, Rates of Change, Second Order Differentiation, Notation Manipulation, Stationary Points, and Increasing and Decreasing Functions
- Integration: Definite Integration, Definite and Indefinite Integrals (which may require simplification), Differential Equations, Fundamental Theorem of Calculus, Combining Integrals

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If you have just finished studying 1st Year A-Level Maths, there may be some topics you have not yet covered (e.g. Differential Equations) and so it is worth learning these topics yourself over summer before sitting the ECAA.

How to Apply

Where can I take the ECAA?

The ECAA can only be taken at an authorised test centre. You can ask the Examinations Officer of your current school or college to register you and you will be able to take the exam on site. If you have already left school or college, you could go back to your old school and sit the paper there. If neither of these options are available to you, then you will have to search for an authorised test centre to register you.

When can I take the ECAA?

You will have to register for the ECAA by 15th October in Year 13. You will sit the test just after the October half-term.

How can I apply for the ECAA?

You cannot register yourself to take the ECAA; the test centre is responsible for registering you. If you are currently attending a school or college, you can ask the Examinations Officer to register you.

If, however, you are not attending a school or college, then you can visit your old school and talk to the Examinations Officer there and they may register you for the ECAA. If not, you may need to look for other test centres nearby and ask them to register you.

Will I be charged to take the ECAA?

Cambridge University does not charge candidates registered at an official test centre.

Results

When will I get my ECAA score?

Exact dates will vary from college to college, but you will usually hear back in January.

Can I receive feedback on my ECAA score?

Yes, feedback will be provided as part of Cambridge's usual feedback process.

How important is my ECAA score?

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The ECAA is fairly important as it is one of the few quantitative measures of a student's academic potential used in the admissions process. Given that most applicants will have received high numbers of A and A* grades, the ECAA helps differentiate students who may otherwise appear very similar. Given the recent scrapping of AS exams, the ECAA is even more important as a way to highlight your academic capabilities to Admission Tutors. Alongside your personal statement and references, it helps provide a more holistic view of you as a student and your potential at university. However, it is important to remember that there are other indicators of your academic capability throughout your application and the ECAA is only one of the parts.

A strong ECAA score is often a good indicator of whether or not you will be called to interview.

How is the ECAA graded?

The ECAA is graded on a scale from 1.0-9.0. The test is graded so that the average candidate scores a 4.0.

What is a 'good' ECAA score?

Generally speaking, around 60% or a score of 5.0+ is seen as a respectable score. There is no set score necessary to gain an interview as it varies from college to college, but some Admissions Tutors may set specific base scores for their college when calling applicants to interview.

Can I re-sit the ECAA if I am not happy with my score?

Given that the ECAA is only sat once a year, there is no opportunity to re-sit the paper for application in the same year. If you desperately feel a re-sit is necessary, you will have to re-apply to Cambridge the following year.

Revision

Where can I find past papers?

Past Papers can be found here: stepmaths.co.uk/free-ecaa

It is recommended you do as many as possible before the test so you are familiar with the types of questions asked and the time pressure faced.

When should I start revising for the ECAA?

It is recommended you start revising for the ECAA in the summer before Year 13. The ECAA is unlikely to be similar to any test you have sat in the past and it will take time to familiarise yourself with the format and the skills necessary to sit the exam. Given that the Problem Solving section is purely skill based, you need time to learn and perfect the skills. This makes cramming just before the test largely unhelpful and, to an extent, counterproductive. Equally, if there are Maths topics you haven't

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encountered before on the syllabus, it is wise to learn these over the summer and spend the first part of Year 13 doing related questions and gaining confidence in answering them.

How should I revise for the ECAA?

The best way to revise for the ECAA is to sit [past papers](#) in timed conditions. It is a highly time-pressured test and so it is necessary to get used to the timings before you sit the exam. This is particularly useful for Section 1 of the ECAA which is highly time pressured.

It is also a good idea to read Economics research papers, books and attend lectures as well as staying up-to-date with current affairs in the field. Although you are not required to have any prior subject-specific knowledge, being aware of current affairs is helpful to provide you with examples and ideas you can refer to in your essay to strengthen your argument.

For help revising for the ECAA, you can access our collection of FREE revision videos at: stepmaths.co.uk/free-ecaa

Other

What equipment is needed to sit the ECAA?

To take Section 1 of the test, a soft pencil is required, and a rubber is also recommended. The use of a dictionary, even a bilingual one, and a calculator are not allowed.

For Section 2, a black ink pen is recommended.

The use of correction fluid is not allowed, so get comfortable with crossing out!

Is extra time allowed for candidates whose first language is not English?

No. Extra time is not permitted for candidates whose first language is not English.

What do I do if I need Access Arrangements?

Access Arrangements are available if you have a disability or a special requirement entitling you to support for other exams.

You will need to inform the test centre of your condition before they register you for the ECAA. You may need to provide details and medical evidence of your disability or special requirement.

What are the guidelines for laptop use?

A candidate using a laptop must not be able to disturb the other candidates and the laptop screen must not be visible to them.

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If the candidate requiring a laptop is taken to a separate room, then they will require an individual invigilator.

Candidates using a laptop should format their work in Arial font, size 11, single-spaced. There is no word limit for the writing task for the ECAA. Automatic spell checkers and grammar checkers must be disabled.

At the end of the test, the candidate using the laptop must be present when their script is printed off, to confirm that the work is theirs. The candidate's name, candidate number, candidate initials and centre number should be clearly written on the printout.

Can I apply for Special Consideration?

Should you feel that temporary illness, injury or other issues affected your test score, you can ask for this to be taken into account as special consideration. A special consideration form must be completed within seven days of sitting the test. If you want to apply for special consideration, talk to the Examinations Officer at your test centre as soon as possible.

Good luck with your ECAA preparation; if you have any questions, please visit stepmaths.co.uk and contact us!

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