

# Youth Direction: Careers

## Guide to Applying for University



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This booklet aims to support you through your University application, from deciding where to study to accepting your place and information on funding available.

## Considering University Top Tips

When deciding which university to go to and what course to take there is a lot to take into consideration.

- ▶ **Research and compare universities and courses** - use websites and open days
  - ▶ [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) - This is the website you will use to complete your applications
  - ▶ [www.unistats.com](http://www.unistats.com) - compares different courses and institutions, looking at student satisfaction, entry requirements and % entering graduate employment
  - ▶ [www.russellgroup.ac.uk](http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk) - represents the UK leading 24 Universities
- ▶ **Location** - you may want to consider opportunities for part time work, is the university located near a town where there are bars and shops etc. Does the university employ students to work in campus based jobs? Look at the websites of the universities you are interested in - many university careers services or student unions advertise local jobs. You may prefer the busy lifestyle in a city based university or you may like a smaller campus based university in a more rural location. Remember this is where you are likely to be living for the next three years or so, it is also important to think about accommodation.

- ▶ **Research your career ideas** - you need to make sure you are choosing the right degree for your chosen career path. Some career routes require specific degrees and give the relevant qualifications to go straight into that area of work e.g. Midwifery. With some degrees it may be necessary to complete post graduate or professional qualifications as well as a degree, e.g. Psychology. Some degrees also need to be accredited by the relevant professional body.
  - ▶ [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) - used by most University careers services – look at Jobs and Work and then Explore Types of Jobs or Industry Insights to see information on a huge range of graduate careers. Click Options with my subject and What Do Graduates Do? To get more ideas on where a degree could lead.
- ▶ **Emphasise importance of employability skills in securing a graduate job** - a degree is not enough – get work experience. Do voluntary work, join clubs and societies. Take on a role of responsibility, e.g. become a Board of Studies Representative.

“...you may prefer the busy lifestyle in a city based university or you may like a smaller campus based university in a more rural location...”



## Applying to University

Once you have done your research and decided which Universities and courses you would like to apply for, you will need to complete an online application through UCAS at [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com).

Almost all applications to full-time degree, HNC/D, foundation degree and Certificate/Diploma of HE courses are made through UCAS, a few courses may require direct application to the institution.

...you can enter up to five course choices. There is no preference order...

Your application must reach UCAS between mid-September and 15th January in the academic year prior to entry, apart from applications to those courses listed below:

- ▶ The closing date for applications to medicine, veterinary medicine/science and dentistry is 15th October in the year prior to entry
- ▶ Applications to the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge should also be made by 15th October in the year prior to entry. Cambridge also require you to complete an additional online application questionnaire. You cannot apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same admissions year, with the one exception of graduates applying for certain courses in Medicine – see the UCAS website for details.
- ▶ Applications to Art & Design courses through UCAS must be received by either 15th January or 24th March, depending on the course.
- ▶ You can enter up to five course choices. There is no preference order.
- ▶ Applicants to medicine, veterinary medicine/science and dentistry courses can make no more than four choices in their desired field. The remaining choices can be used for any alternative subjects, including the other subjects listed above. For example, if you have made four choices for medicine, you can also apply for dentistry.

# Writing your Personal Statement

In the space provided for your personal statement you can enter any information you believe to be relevant and which is not given anywhere else on the form. It provides you with an invaluable opportunity to influence the admissions tutor and explain your motivation.

You have 47 lines/4000 characters to sell yourself – so every word counts. Although you can type your statement directly into Apply and keep saving drafts and returning to it later, UCAS recommends that you compose your statement using a word-processing package and paste it into Apply when finished.

## What to include in your personal statement

- ▶ It should be an organised and literate presentation, with no mistakes in paragraphing, punctuation, grammar or spelling.
- ▶ Clear layout and development of ideas.

## About the course

- ▶ Clear indication of your motivation towards or relevant background for the courses applied for. Ask yourself: Why do I want to study the subject? Is there something I can say about how my interest has developed (this is especially important if you are applying for something you've not studied before). Be specific and give examples. Evidence of commitment beyond the curriculum is welcomed and will be important for competitive programmes.
- ▶ Evidence that you realise what the study of the subject is likely to entail. Ask yourself: Am I mentioning only the exciting or accessible aspects of this subject or associated career? Do I know the subject broadly enough? Am I prepared for the breadth of a university programme?

“...Why do I want to study the subject? Is there something I can say about how my interest has developed...”

- ▶ Interests to relevance of the course at their institution. Avoid writing your personal statement to support only one of your applications, even if it is your favourite. Write separately to that particular University with additional information if you wish.
- ▶ If you are applying for a joint course you need to address both subjects. If you are applying for two very different subjects, you will need to explain your reasons for that, and show there is logic or a theme behind your choice.

## About you

- ▶ Information about extra-curricular involvements and activities. These can help to demonstrate general levels of energy and enthusiasm, some capacity for time management and setting of priorities and evidence key skills. They may also be relevant to the course applied for. A reflective and well-organised presentation of this information is advantageous, you need to point out the relevance of your experience.
- ▶ Identify the particular strengths, abilities and skills you have developed that are related to your chosen subject, and include these in your application. Remember to check course entry profiles for indicators of the qualities admissions staff look for. Give examples of evidence to support any statements you make.
- ▶ If you are intending to defer your application to do a gap year, describe what you are planning to do and how it will benefit you.

Remember the personal statement may be the only piece of your written work that the University sees, so it will convey a vital impression of your competence. If you are interviewed, the personal statement can help set the agenda for the interview discussion.



# Tracking your application

When UCAS receives your application, you will be sent a welcome email confirming your personal details and course choices. The application is processed and then all the universities to which you have applied are able to access it online. The universities consider your application and you may be invited for interviews. University admissions tutors will not be able to see which other universities you have applied to, until you reply to their offer.

You can follow the progress of your application by using Track on the UCAS website. When the institutions you have applied to have made their decisions you will be notified. They will either make you an offer or tell you your application has been unsuccessful. The institutions you have applied to can also use Track to invite you to an interview or audition, or ask you to provide a portfolio, essay or other examples of your work. Offers are usually conditional on you achieving certain grades, or gaining enough UCAS Tariff points.

You don't need to reply to any offers until you have received all your decisions through UCAS. You may not accept more than two offers and you must tell UCAS, by the date shown on Track, which offer you wish to firmly accept and which you are accepting as an insurance place. If you are accepting an unconditional offer as your firm offer, you cannot hold an insurance offer. If you fail to decide on your offers by the deadline given, you may lose them.

# Aptitude Tests

Although aptitude tests are only required by a relatively small proportion of HE applicants, institutions are increasingly using them as an aid to selection. These test specific skills and pick up on things like your ability to learn in depth and your attitude to different kinds of study. Tests that are widely used by universities for admissions to particular courses include:

- ▶ LNAT admissions test for Law
- ▶ GAMSAT and UKCAT tests for medicine and dentistry
- ▶ The BMAT test for medicine, veterinary medicine and biomedical science courses.

A number of universities have also devised their own tests for admission to certain courses.

“You can follow the progress of your application by using Track on the UCAS website...”

# Interviews

Not many applicants are invited to an interview, most are selected purely on their application and exam results. However, if you are one of the few, think about the points in your personal statement that you would like to emphasise. Practice answering likely questions about your current studies, and why you have chosen particular subjects at that particular institution. Admissions tutors will be looking for motivation and enthusiasm as well as the academic ability to complete the course. Examples of questions you may be asked include:

- ▶ Tell me about yourself
- ▶ Tell us about your current course
- ▶ Why do you want to study for a degree?
- ▶ What attracts you to this course?
- ▶ What do you like about the subjects you studied for A Level?
- ▶ Why did you apply to this University?
- ▶ Why should we offer you a place?
- ▶ What are the most important current developments in your chosen subject?
- ▶ What do you believe to be the function of a good university?
- ▶ How do you think you will benefit from university education?



## Extra

Extra is available from the end of February to early July. If you have no offers (because you haven't received any, or you have decided not to accept any) and provided that you have used all five choices in your original application, Extra allows you to apply for any course that still has vacancies before Clearing begins, one course at a time. Courses with vacancies will be indicated on the UCAS website and you can apply using Track. If you are eligible for Extra, an 'Extra' button will appear on your track screen.

## Clearing

The clearing process operates between July and September. Clearing offers a limited number of course places to students who:

- ▶ Do not hold any offers (including those who have turned down offers received)
- ▶ Hold conditional offers but did not achieve the required grades in their exams
- ▶ Submitted their UCAS application after 30th June

UCAS notifies applications that they are eligible for clearing through Track and provides instructions on the Clearing procedures. Applicants can then make direct contact with any institutions that still have places. Throughout the Clearing period, vacancies are updated regularly on the UCAS website and are also advertised in the national media.

## Adjustment

If you meet and exceed all the conditions of your firmly accepted conditional offer, you may look for an alternative place for five days, whilst still keeping your original firm place. The five day Adjustment period starts on A Level results day or the day your firm choice institution confirms your place, whichever is later. You apply for courses in Adjustment on Track. The Adjustment period does not apply to insurance offers.

## Taking a year out

You can defer your entry to university for a year by indicating this on your applications. You should explain in your personal statement your reasons for wanting a year out, as selectors will look for positive plans. Make sure that you check with your chosen institutions that they accept deferred entry. They are under no obligation to do so. However, most admissions tutors view a year out as a beneficial experience, as long as you use the time constructively.

“...make sure that you check with your chosen institutions that they accept deferred entry...”

# Funding your Higher Education

There is a range of financial support available to help you through University. Students can complete an application online at [www.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.gov.uk/studentfinance).

## The Student Finance Package includes:

### ▶ Tuition Fee Loan

- ▶ Eligible students will not have to pay up front for their tuition.
- ▶ The non means tested tuition fee loan (not dependent on household income) is available to cover the fee levels set by the University (Up to £9000 max for full-time courses)
- ▶ The Student Loans Company will lend the requested amount and pay the University directly in instalments across the academic year.
- ▶ It is not compulsory to take the loan, students can pay full fees themselves or pay part of the fees and take tuition fee loan for the rest

### ▶ Maintenance (Living Cost) Support

- ▶ **Maintenance Loan** – To provide help with your living expenses, you can apply for a Maintenance Loan which will depend on where the student lives and studies while in Higher Education
- ▶ **Maintenance Grant** – this is an income-assessed grant. If you receive a Maintenance Grant, the amount of Maintenance Loan you can borrow is reduced. In certain circumstances, if you are a lone parent or claim certain benefits, instead of getting the Maintenance Grant, you may be entitled to a Special Support Grant.

### ▶ Scholarships and Bursaries

- ▶ Various bursaries and scholarships may be available to you. These are paid through your University. In England the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) provides support for students which is household income based. Universities decide which students to fund and by how much, you should apply directly to your chosen University. Funding from the NSP can go towards tuition fees, accommodation costs or it may be in the form of a cash bursary.
- ▶ Students on certain healthcare courses can get financial help from NHS student bursaries. There are variations in the scheme in different parts of the UK.
- ▶ For students studying Social Work you may be entitled to a Social Work Bursary. The bursary is not income assessed, however there are restrictions on the number of bursaries available.

## Additional Support

- ▶ **Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs)** - Help towards the additional costs that a student may face as a result of a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. DSAs are non-repayable, and not income assessed, how much you get depends on your needs.
- ▶ **Students with dependants** – support is available for those with children or adult dependants. Your entitlement depends on your income, but the grants are non-repayable

# Student Loan Repayment

- ▶ Graduates will not make repayment contributions until they are earning at least £21,000
- ▶ Full time students will begin to repay in the April after graduating from/leaving their HE course
- ▶ Repayments will be a basic 9% of income over £21,000 and will be deducted automatically from pay through the HMRC tax system for most students
- ▶ If income falls to £21,000 or below repayments will be suspended
- ▶ Any outstanding loan balance will be cleared 30 years after entering repayment

## Student Loan Repayment

Gross Income	Monthly Repayment
£16,000	£0
£18,000	£0
£21,000	£0
£24,000	£23
£27,000	£45
£30,000	£68
£33,000	£90
£36,000	£113

## Key Points

- ▶ It is important you make the right University and course choice based on the full range of factors linked to the course, not fear of debt
- ▶ Complete your application as early as possible to make sure your student finance is in place for the start of your studies
- ▶ You don't need a confirmed place at University to apply for student finance
- ▶ If unsure of the fee amount needed, select maximum
- ▶ Research all finance available – especially bursaries and scholarships
- ▶ Ensure all details are correct before submitting an application, and let student finance know about any changes

