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## **Applying to University**

**An Essential Guide for Parents  
and Students**

**2018**

# Applying to University: Information for Year 12 students and parents

This booklet is designed to help you all work your way through the university application process.

I realise that some students are not planning on going to university and they should have already been to see me to discuss their future plans. I have given them advice as to how they should start to investigate their future beyond school, and there are some very useful websites for such students on page 6.

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## Initial student research

It is essential that students do a lot of research before they make any decisions about which universities they want to apply to. There are over 300 institutions offering university degree courses and students can only apply to 5 at most, so thorough research is vital.

- ❖ The best starting place is the UCAS website – [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com). Students are already familiar with this website.

### The UCAS website

UCAS is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education (HE) courses in the UK. The UCAS website has a comprehensive online database of over 50,000 HE courses at more than 300 universities and colleges that are members of UCAS. The courses have what are known as “entry profiles”, which give extra information such as:

- the content of the course;
- who it might be suitable for;
- what the entry requirements are;
- how it is assessed;
- potential career opportunities, and
- student satisfaction.

All course details (including information on fees, bursaries and financial support) are supplied directly by the universities and colleges themselves. The information on the UCAS website is updated daily, so there’s no danger of students wasting their time wading through out-of-date information. Students can search for the courses in their chosen subject and, if needs be, restrict their search to one university or college, or to a specific region of the UK, by using the new search tool [www.search.ucas.com](http://www.search.ucas.com)

## What now?

Between exams and the start of next term, students need to begin researching courses and universities, looking at every aspect possible. They need to look at the course and its suitability, matching with personal interests, whether the required entry grades match the students' real ability, as well as bursaries/scholarships available, the location, accommodation options, extra-curricular activities and so on. All students should spend a considerable number of hours doing further research on courses and universities before early September.

## UCAS Parent link

There is a very helpful section especially for parents, which has been found in previous years to be invaluable: [www.ucas.com/parents](http://www.ucas.com/parents). It features articles on issues including finance, student welfare and selecting the right course and university, with plenty of advice and tips that parents need to support their child's application.

You can sign up for the parent newsletters too which offer advice through the application cycle.

## League Tables

Many parents consult these when helping their child to choose a course or university. There are several league tables published in the UK which all use different weightings and methodology, so it makes sense to compare them. I recommend that these are used together with information gained from prospectuses and websites, as well as an understanding of the student's strengths and interests. There are 2 websites which we use with the students to help them compare universities they are considering:

- <https://unistats.direct.gov.uk>
- [www.university.which.co.uk](http://www.university.which.co.uk).

These have been very useful and are extremely easy to use.

## The Russell Group

At the top of many league tables are universities that are a part of the Russell Group. This is a collection of 24 leading UK universities, who are all committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience, and unrivalled links with business and the public sector. Students can be sure to receive world-class teaching and access to resources at these institutions, and employers are also aware of this. The Group consists of:

- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- Cardiff University
- Durham University

- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- Imperial College London
- King's College London
- University of Leeds
- University of Liverpool
- London School of Economics and Political Science
- University of Manchester
- Newcastle University
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford
- Queen Mary University of London
- Queen's University Belfast
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University College London
- University of Warwick
- University of York

More information about the work and the ethos of the Group can be found on their website <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/>.

## Key facts

By the start of next term, the vast majority of students should have decided which 5 courses and universities they want to apply to.

### ❖ Oxford and Cambridge

Students wanting to apply to Oxford or Cambridge can only apply to one or the other - NOT both. We expect students to have expressed a desire to apply to Oxbridge by the start of January 2017 and these students will have already received a significant amount of advice and should be acting on it. Competition is extremely fierce and we advise students honestly about their likely chances of success. Experience tells us that only the very best succeed, namely students with at least the majority of their GCSEs at A\*, over 90% in all their AS exams and top grade predictions at A level; not to mention their general academic breadth and genuine curiosity in the subject they want to study. Most successful Oxbridge applicants are top of their year in at least one of the subjects they study.

### ❖ Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine/Science

Students who want to study medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine/science can only make 4 choices for these subjects but they can make one further choice for a different course if they wish, making a total of 5 choices. Applicants must check whether they have to do the UKCAT or BMAT and register accordingly. Competition for medicine, dentistry and veterinary science is severe; it must be pointed out that there is less than a 1:2 chance of getting an offer at the first attempt and, in our

experience, this is for applicants with at least 7 A\* grades at GCSE, and top grade predictions in 4 A levels. Students who are intending to apply for these disciplines should have received much advice over the course of the year and should have a significant amount of relevant work experience to discuss in their personal statement to support their application, in addition to having read relevant scientific journals and medical ethics publications as a matter of routine since they started in the Sixth Form.

- ❖ Students may apply to do more than one course at a particular university but each course counts as one of the 5 choices. This is not uncommon.
- ❖ Students who want to go to university but are not sure what they want to do should have already been to see me. If not they must do so before the end of this term.
- ❖ Students who want to defer entry to 2019 still apply this year.
- ❖ Students who want to take a gap year and apply once they have left Haywood should follow the process carefully this year so they are familiar with the system when they come to apply. We do support students who choose to apply during their gap year as well as providing an academic reference.

## Resources at City College

There are books in the college to support the students' careers/university research, together with prospectuses for most of the universities, which the students have already been encouraged to use to supplement their internet research.

Other useful websites for students not thinking of university are:

- [www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/](http://www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/)
- [www.pwc.co.uk](http://www.pwc.co.uk)
- [www.notgoingtouni.co.uk](http://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk)
- [www.etrust.org.uk/the-year-in-industry](http://www.etrust.org.uk/the-year-in-industry)
- [www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships](http://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships)

Form Tutors will be routinely informing students of useful websites and opportunities relating to diverse career opportunities. They know that they have to research these opportunities independently if they are interested, but can come and ask for advice and assistance if needed.

## University open days

We encourage students to book Open Days at the weekend, wherever possible. Many universities now favour weekend open days so that parents can attend and students do not miss lessons. However, we recognise that some universities do not hold open days at the weekend so we allow students to take a maximum of 3 days off for such visits, and students are required to get permission from their teachers to attend an Open Day. We do encourage students to be sensible when booking open days and only visit universities that they are seriously considering.

If you are unable to attend an Open Day or would just like to view a university without visiting it there are a number of virtual tours available again through the UCAS site.

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## The personal statement

In addition to doing as much research as possible before the start of next term, students should also be writing their personal statement. The personal statement is the student's chance to tell the universities why they should offer them a place! A good personal statement is very important – it should be obvious from the personal statement that the applicant is genuinely interested in the course. In many cases applicants are not interviewed so the personal statement may be the only chance to make the case for admission. Students should consider carefully the information they give and the best way to present it effectively, whilst being truthful and accurate. They should not be tempted to copy the many commercially available personal statements, which admissions tutors are very familiar with, and UCAS do also undertake checks for plagiarism.

The students are told that the personal statement should include the following points:

- What interests you about your chosen subject? Most importantly include details of what you have read about the subject outside of your AS/A level studies. You must show a genuine enthusiasm for your chosen subject.
- Any job, work experience, placement or voluntary work you have done, particularly if it is relevant to your subject. Mention skills and experience you have gained from these activities.
- Any relevant visit to a museum, theatre, concert, exhibition, which may be related to your chosen course and how this has benefitted you.
- Any involvement in widening participation schemes, such as summer schools or mentoring activities, involvement in master classes or other academic programmes.
- Details of non-accredited skills and achievements that you have gained through activities such as Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Cadets, Young Enterprise, Young Engineers and National Citizen Service.
- Any subjects you are studying that do not have a formal assessment (enrichment subjects for example).
- If you are planning to take a year out, give reasons why. Students should check if the universities they are considering look favourably on gap years or not.
- Social, sports or leisure interests.

The personal statement can be up to 4,000 characters long (including spaces). This should be word-processed, and once the statement has been approved by the form tutor, it can be copied and pasted into the application.

The most important part of the statement is the opening sentence. This should be interesting, but not gimmicky, and captivate the attention of the admissions tutor who will be reading it. It has to be remembered that admissions tutors read thousands of applications so a good opening sentence will encourage them to read further. Students are strongly advised to avoid quotes in their opening sentence.

Students will receive considerable advice about writing a personal statement at the start of next term. Any student needing further advice should discuss this with their form tutor in the first instance.

Additional support can be found on the UCAS website via the home page in Undergraduate Section Part 3, Apply and Track, Select “Writing a personal statement”.

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## The application

The actual application to UCAS is done online and students will be given full information about this during our UCAS day.

The cost of the application is £13.00 for one choice and £24.00 for two or more choices (or for any applications made after 30<sup>th</sup> June), but this is not payable online until the application is complete, and will be funded by the college.

There are many UCAS-based assemblies for the students between now and October half term so they will be kept up to date with what they should be doing and when.

### Student loans/Student finance

The most up-to-date information about student loans is given as soon as I receive it, normally after Christmas of Year 13. However, students can research this online during the application process. The student loan application is also completed online and it will usually have to be finalised by the end of May in the year of application, unless the student has made a deferred entry application. Student finance information is readily available online and the online **student finance calculator** is a useful tool. This, the application form and other useful information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>

### Key deadlines

Our deadline for applications for all Oxbridge applicants, and those applying for medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine/science is **Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September**. For all other applications the deadline is **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October**. I strongly advise students to get their application in before these dates if possible, as I know from experience that some universities have previously increased their offer grades for later applications. Please remember that there is a significant amount of administration involved once the student has completed their application. However, we do aim to send the application to UCAS within a couple of weeks after it has been completed.

### The reference

- ❖ Each student has a college reference sent with their application.

- ❖ The referee will have interviewed the student before writing the reference and he/she will also have a subject report specifically for the UCAS reference from each of the student's teachers.
  - ❖ The reference is normally about 300/400 words in length.
  - ❖ These are positive references which the students are allowed to read and discuss with their referee in the college.
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## ...and finally

To recap, this is what must be done over the summer holidays:

- ❖ Complete all research using [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) as the main resource.
- ❖ Decide which courses to apply for and where. BE REALISTIC. Initial choices may need to be reviewed once AS grades are known in August.
- ❖ Write a first draft of the personal statement which must be brought into the college on the first day of term.
- ❖ If any student needs clarification of any of the above they should see me before the end of term.
- ❖ If any parent would like to talk over any aspect of the application now or as the process unfolds, please give me a call.

I wish you all the best as you embark on this task.

*Mrs P. Fergusson*  
*Director of College Education*