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## **Applying to University**

**An Essential Guide for Parents  
and Students**

# 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.

Obviously, this is not exhaustive, and there will be websites and suggestions that have been forgotten. If you need any further advice, or have any questions not answered here, please get in touch:

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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 – [ucas.com](https://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information on the UCAS website is updated daily, so there’s no danger of students wasting their time wading through out-of-date information.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 search tool [digital.ucas.com/search](https://digital.ucas.com/search).

## 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: [ucas.com/parents](https://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. We 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:

- [discoveruni.gov.uk](https://discoveruni.gov.uk)
- [university.which.co.uk](https://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](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk)
- [University of Bristol](https://www.bristol.ac.uk)
- [University of Cambridge](https://www.cambridge.ac.uk)
- [Cardiff University](https://www.cardiff.ac.uk)

- [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 [russellgroup.ac.uk/](http://russellgroup.ac.uk/).

## Key facts

By the start of Year 13, 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 in Year 12, and these students will have already received a significant amount of advice that they should be acting on. 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\*, top grade predictions at A level, and a 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 UCAT 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 college.

- ❖ 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 the next academic year still apply this year.
- ❖ Students who want to take a gap year and apply once they have left 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' university research, together with prospectuses for most of the universities, which the students have already been encouraged to use to supplement their internet research. We also have a range of resources available that students can use if they are preparing for the UCAT, BMAT or LNAT (Law National Aptitude Test), as well as information regarding a wide range of careers, that previous students have shown a particular interest in.

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 2 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.

## Other opportunities

As a college, we also provide students with the opportunity to attend some open days and events at local and slightly less local universities. During their time with us, all A level/BTEC students should have attended at least one campus visit.

We also support students who want to make applications for access schemes such as those offered by the Social Mobility Fund, Sutton Trust and Nuffield Foundation. We will signpost some students towards these if we feel that they would be successful and beneficial, but also encourage students to look into options available and come to us with any suggestions that they feel would benefit them.

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## The personal statement

In addition to doing as much research as possible, students should also be writing their personal statement over the Summer Term and summer holiday at the end of Year 12. 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. Many universities and courses do not interview applicants, 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 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 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 form. Students applying to Oxbridge will require personal statements with a stronger focus on the first few points on the above list, with less focus on those at the end.

The most important part of the statement is the opening sentence. This should be interesting, but not gimmicky, and catch 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, especially in their opening sentence.

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

Additional support can be found here: [ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-write-ucas-undergraduate-personal-statement](https://ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-write-ucas-undergraduate-personal-statement).

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## The application

The applications to university are all done online through UCAS.

The cost of the application is £20 for one choice and £26 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.

Students should have begun completing the basics of their application before the summer, and will have plenty of Tutorial and Enrichment time at the start of Y13 to complete this.

## Student loans/Student finance

Many students are put off applying to university due to the cost and the perceived burden that this puts on both students and parents. Maybe a better way of looking at this is as a 'Graduate Tax' that is paid once a student is in employment, rather than as a 'loan'.

A few key points:

- All students are eligible for a Tuition Fee Loan, which covers the course fees (currently £9,250 per year). This has to be repaid.
- All students can apply for a Maintenance Loan, to help cover living costs. This will also need to be repaid. The amount that students are eligible for will differ depending on

household income, and depending on where they are studying. To give some sort of idea:

Where you live and/or study	Maximum Maintenance Loan
<i>Living with parents</i>	<i>£7,747</i>
<i>Living away from home, studying outside London</i>	<i>£9,203</i>
<i>Living away from home, studying in London</i>	<i>£12,010</i>
<i>Living and studying abroad</i>	<i>£10,539</i>

- There are also loans available for students who are carers or who have dependants.
- Students only begin to pay this money back once they are earning over £25,000 per year. After 30 years, any remaining debt is wiped off. Graduates also stop paying if their income falls below this level. For the average graduate, the cost per month is equal to that of a coffee.
- Other financial assistance may be available from the universities themselves. Some of this is means tested using the information provided to Student Finance, but some of this may need to be applied for separately. Check with the universities applying to.

The student loan application is 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, to ensure payment before the start of the course. 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: [gov.uk/student-finance](http://gov.uk/student-finance).

Students complete one part of this form, and will provide contact details for parents. Parents will then receive an email advising them of how they can fill in their section of the form, detailing income and providing evidence for this. It is only once both these sections are complete that the application will be processed.

## Key deadlines

The deadline for applications for all Oxbridge applicants, and those applying for medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine/science is **15<sup>th</sup> October**. For all other applications the deadline is **15<sup>th</sup> January**. We will set earlier deadlines for students in order to give us time to check all applications, and to add staff references and predicted grades. 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 4,000 characters in length.
- ❖ These are positive references which the students are allowed to read and discuss with their referee in the college.

- ❖ We aim to discuss in this a student's academic ability, performance in lessons relative to their peers, personal qualities, aptitude for the subject chosen, and any other experiences that a student has had that we feel worthy of inclusion. If there are any extenuating circumstances that have negatively impacted a student's performance, we also document this here. Above all, we have to be honest!
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## ...and finally

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

- ❖ Complete all research using [ucas.com](https://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 mock grades are known.
- ❖ Write a first draft of the personal statement which must be brought into the college at the start of term.
- ❖ If any student needs clarification of any of the above they should staff 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 us a call.

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