



Applying to University

September 2021

A Guide for Sixth Form
Students and their Parents

This booklet gives you a summary of the process for applying to Higher Education and includes important information, advice, dates and useful websites. Please keep it safe for future reference.

You can also access all UCAS information for students and parents from the Sixth Form Section of the HCS website. Parents can download the Parent Guide, the Parent Information Tool and FAQs and also sign up for the monthly Parent Newsletter. Students can research courses, apply and track their progress on-line, get access to subject-specific email updates and receive regular information bulletins.

Students will also receive additional detailed information from us about specific aspects of the process that affect them at key points in the year. Parents can access these on our website and we will send information emails to parents at key points in the year.

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Reasons for going to university

You should now be thinking about what you are intending to do after completing your A Levels. While some of you may be intending to seek employment or an apprenticeship, the majority of you will be applying for university or other higher education courses. It is very important that you prepare your HE application carefully because the decisions you make will affect the next three or four years of your lives and, possibly, beyond.

There are many reasons for going to university:

- Increase potential earnings and improve career prospects [*'Over the course of a lifetime, estimates suggest women can expect to [earn about £250,000 more](#) if they have a degree, while the figure is roughly £170,000 for men.'* Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2017].
- Social and cultural reasons - broaden your horizons and your ways of looking at the world.
- Exciting opportunities to live/ study/ work abroad or spend a year in industry or do an internship – all excellent additions to your CV.
- Academic challenge - broaden and deepen your interests and knowledge.
- Personal challenge - develop self-confidence, responsibility, independence, initiative...
- It can also be immense fun and you'll make lifelong friends!

In fact, there has never been a better time to apply to university:

- There is currently a dip in the number of 18 year-olds in the UK population which will last until next year.
- Fewer part-time and mature students are applying to university [increased employment, higher minimum wage, more apprenticeship opportunities] so the target recruitment market is 18 year-olds.
- The number of university places increased with the removal of the cap in 2015.
- More offers are being made – more than at any point in the history of HE.
- Offers have lowered – in 2011, 17% of students got into competitive universities with BBB at A Level; in 2016, it was 41%.
- Some universities are also more prepared to take you if you are just below the entry requirements on Results Day.

Unsure about your future career?

Very few students in Year 12 are sure about their long-term career plans so don't worry! It has, in fact, been forecast that 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 have not been invented yet! [Dell Technologies, 2017]

Some careers - Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Teaching, Architecture, Engineering ... – do obviously require specific degree courses. However, most graduate level jobs are not concerned with your degree subject knowledge – what's important is that you are a graduate and, therefore, can solve problems, communicate effectively, think critically and analytically, gather/ evaluate/ synthesise information, lead, work in teams, work under pressure, have time management and decision-making skills, show enterprise and initiative ...

Many employers in accountancy, business, banking, law and the media positively prefer you to study a different academic subject at university and then train you for the profession after you graduate - in which case **your focus should be on gaining a good honours degree in a subject you really enjoy.**

If you're interested in a career in music, dance or drama, you can choose between applying through UCAS Undergraduate or UCAS Conservatoires. [A conservatoire is a college that specialises in performance-based courses but also includes academic study.] Speak to Ms Hall or Mr Naqvi for more information.

If you do have specific careers in mind, do discuss them with your form tutor, subject teachers or the Post 16 Team.

Degree courses

Standard degree courses [B.A., B.Sc.] are three years but many can be four years and involve a foundation year [if you have not studied the relevant subjects], a year spent in industry or a year studying at a university abroad. Degrees in Scottish universities are four years and you receive an M.A.

Your degree will be awarded by the university you attend; most degrees are Honours degrees and are differentiated by classes rather than grades - first, upper second [2.1], lower second [2.2] and third.

Choosing your Subject

There are over 50,000 courses offered by more than 395 higher education providers in the UK - the choice is huge! Unless you have got clear ideas about your future career and need to follow a specific degree course, university is your opportunity to study a **subject** that really interests and excites you.

You might choose to continue a subject you are currently enjoying [eg Chemistry, Maths, English] or start a subject you are not currently studying [eg Geography] or study an entirely new subject - Business, Law, Marine Biology, Materials Technology There are even degrees in Viking Studies, Applied Golf Management, Equestrian Psychology and Circus and Physical Performance ... so find out what's out there to suit you!

You might prefer to take a Flexible or Joint Honours [studying two or more different subjects] or take a broader American-type degree combining a range of different studies - it's called Liberal Arts at Bristol and Leeds, Arts and Sciences at UCL, Liberal Arts and Sciences at Birmingham ...

There are subject guides and a range of useful resources to help you choose subjects at:

-  www.ucas.com/ucas/subject-guide-list
-  www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/ what-study
-  www.thestudentroom.co.uk/ a-z-of-subject-guides
-  www.bestcourse4me.com

Become familiar with the **UCAS search tool** [www.ucas.com] this term: if you type in your chosen subject[s], you get a list of all the HE providers in the UK and you can see the IB entry requirements and how the course is rated on [Unistats/ Discover Uni](#). It also gives you a link to each university website where you can find full details about the course. You can shortlist courses and save your searches - and it's mobile-friendly if you prefer to do your research on tablets and mobiles. Sign up to **The UCAS Hub** where you'll have your own dashboard which you can customise and tailor to your needs. Here you can save your research, edit, and return to it at any time.

Course Content

Once you have chosen your subject[s], look very carefully at the **course content**. This is vitally important as courses vary hugely and two courses with the same subject title at two different universities could be very different: Geography, Economics or Psychology, for example, could be arts-based [B.A.] or science-based [B.Sc.]; texts studied for English Literature at Durham are very different from the ones at UEA.

Check if you need work experience for your chosen course

Relevant work experience is essential for vocational courses such as Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science, and also for related courses such as Physiotherapy. Try to arrange this for later in the year so and also try to organise some volunteering. Don't simply 'clock-up' the hours but record your experiences in a diary and learn from them - these reflections will be vitally important for your personal statement and interview. Ask Ms Hall or Mr Naqvi for advice if you're applying for any of these courses. This year, we have provided a range of virtual work experiences through our collaboration with Medic Mentors.



Check the entry requirements

All universities have minimum entry requirements, for example, at least five passes at **GCSE** which often include English and Mathematics [at least a 4 in each but sometimes 7 or 6 so check carefully]. They may specify other GCSE requirements, depending on the course you wish to study. **You cannot be accepted without these.**

Individual degree course requirements are very specific and state, for example, that you must have Chemistry or Mathematics at Higher Level to read the subject at university. This should be checked very carefully so that you don't waste any UCAS choices by applying for courses for which you are not eligible.

It is essential that you combine your **ambitions** with **realism**: there is no point applying for a course at a university that asks for 120 UCAS points if you are likely to be on 96 points. Use your Year 12 attainment grades and Year 13 mocks as an indicator of your ability and make sure you talk to subject teachers about what they think you are realistically capable of achieving. They will predict your grades, initially based on your current performance but taking your potential into account. The predicted grade is arrived at on the basis of your September Mocks, class work, homework as well as your Year 12 Mock Examinations.

In general, the more competitive the course/ university, the higher the entry requirements are likely to be e.g. Warwick asks for 152 points, including 5 in Maths, for Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Birmingham asks for 136 points and are not flexible if you do not achieve this. On the other hand, some universities, if they like your personal statement, academic grades and reference, could make you a lower offer!

Do your research very carefully and **read the small print!** Some Medical Schools [e.g. QMUL, Leicester] do not accept students who have spent their sixth form study over three years; Exeter Medical School asks for 128 points but they will only interview you if you are predicted 144 points.

You may also have to sit **admissions tests** as part of the entry requirement for some courses [see page 13]. A word to Medics about UCAT: do your research and check the weighting of UCAT very carefully in the scoring system at each medical school. If you don't have an exceptional score, there is no point applying to Newcastle! On the other hand, if you've got a low UCAT score, you could apply to Cardiff where a good academic profile at GCSE is important. And don't rule out a medical school which asks for BMAT [[Research changes to Section 1 of BMAT this year](#)].

Choosing Universities

You can apply to **five** universities on a UCAS application [**four** for Medicine, Veterinary Science and Dentistry and one for another course e.g. Biomedicine; Oxbridge applicants can apply to no more than **one** course at either Oxford or Cambridge]. Given the large number and wide range of institutions, this can prove a daunting task!

Begin by drawing up a 'long list' before deciding on your final short-list. It's a good idea to create a table with all the universities you have in mind and compare each across a range of different requirements that are important to you.

You should consider the following factors:

- 📖 **Course:** This is the most important one: is it the specific course you want? Most universities offer History degrees, for example, but some may specialise in modern history, others in ancient history. Do you want to study BA Economics or BSc Economics? Physical Geography or Human Geography? It is important to look closely at the **course content year by year** – for example, the core modules you'll be studying and the range of optional topics, and whether there is an opportunity to spend a term or year abroad [*64% of employers consider an international experience to be important for graduate recruitment – The Erasmus Impact Study*]. You'll also want to check whether the course is accredited by a relevant body or has work placement links with industry or the chance of an internship, all of which could give you a head start when it comes to getting a job.
- 📖 **Entry requirements [see page 5]:** Your final selection of universities should be both ambitious and academically realistic: it is unwise to apply for five universities which all expect, for example, 36 points and you should include **at least one** university which has lower entry requirements in case you don't meet the higher entry requirements of your other choices. This is called your '**insurance**' choice. However, do not put down a 'low offer' university on your form that you have no intention of going to – ensure that every choice counts. This is why it is important to visit your chosen universities – even if is only virtually at the moment.
- 📖 **Type of university:** Traditional [Manchester] or modern [Sussex]; city [London] or self-contained campus [Warwick] or collegiate [Durham]?
- 📖 **Location and environment:** It is important to find a university location where you will be happy to live – do you want a large, busy university of 20,000 students or a smaller place where you will know everyone? Do you want a university that is in or close to a large city? Or near to the sea or countryside? Do you want to live at home or would you be prepared to move 200 miles away if it is the right course? Does the university guarantee accommodation for first year students? What is the accommodation like? [*60% of students say that this is as important as course content!*] Will you have to pay expensive bus fares to travel from your accommodation to university? Are there parking facilities/ bike racks? Remember: where you choose to go to university is where you will be living, at least during term time, for the next three or four years.
- 📖 **Cost:** Tuition fees are roughly the same - up to £9250; courses in Wales are capped at £9000. EU students may be eligible for 'home fee' status if you have been in the country for more than 3 years. (settled status or ILR) However, there are big differences in the cost of living in different areas: London is the most expensive place to study and live; accommodation in the North tends to be cheaper. Look at <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/.../uks-regional-student-living-costs-revealed> or <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/news/cheapest-student-cities-uk> and use the UCAS budget calculator tool. Also research the scholarships and bursaries offered by each university – you could receive money because you come from a low income household or live in a certain postcode district or excel at a sport or achieve excellent IB results. [There is guidance about student finance on pages 20 - 21.]
- 📖 **Style of teaching and assessment:** Consider how you score your best marks. Some university courses might be assessed largely by project work or coursework, others by final exams. Some may be taught by traditional methods while others may use Problem-Based Learning. All of these are important factors in finding the right course for you.

- 📖 **Teaching hours:** Will you have a very structured timetable with lectures, seminars or practical work or will you be expected to do a lot of work independently in the library? Teaching hours will vary depending on the subject you're applying for - for example there will be fewer time-tabled hours on an English course than an Engineering one, but you'll be expected to do 'self-guided' study the rest of the time. Research this on discoveruni.gov.uk.
Look at how universities have adapted to Covid this year, this might continue next year.
- 📖 **Opportunities and facilities:** What are the academic facilities like [library/ IT facilities/ laboratories]? Do you want to be at a university with a large indoor sports centre and Olympic-size swimming pool? Or with excellent music or drama facilities? Or with an opportunity to work or study abroad? What support services are provided [eg careers service, counselling, finance and medical]? What support facilities exist for students with additional needs? What safety and security measures are in place? Is there a range of activities, clubs and societies? What social events does the students' union arrange? Some universities are more active than others so ask when you attend your Virtual Open Days.
- 📖 **Student ratios:** Research the ratio of applicants to places. You might also want to consider the ratio of students-to-staff which will give you an idea of investment in teaching. Are you concerned about the kind of students you'll meet on the course? – the ratio of males to females or private school to state school students or the proportion of mature students you'll be studying with? If so, check the statistics and Virtual Open Days can give you some feel for the place.
- 📖 **Academic reputation of university:** Having a degree from a highly ranked university could give you an edge with employers but don't limit your applications solely to Russell Group universities. Remember that many highly ranked, competitive and popular universities [eg Bath, Loughborough, Lancaster] are not part of this group. University league tables are published in The Times [www.timeshighereducation.com] and [The Guardian](http://TheGuardian.com) or at <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk> - but it is important to check the weighting and methodology of league tables to understand their bias as they do vary. You can also check the government's Teaching Excellence Framework [with gold, silver and bronze ratings], Research Excellence Framework and reports by the Quality Assurance Agency. Be aware too that there can be a variation in standards from one department to another within the same university so look at subject rankings not just university rankings. The results can be surprising: Bath is currently number 9 in the Complete University Guide's table but their Psychology Faculty is rated second in the UK. Make sure you look at the student satisfaction rates of courses you're interested in at discoveruni.gov.uk – these include quality of teaching, assessment feedback, academic support, learning resources ... Attend Virtual Open Days or taster classes and speak to tutors and students there to see if the teaching style and wider student experience suits you! In fact, the most useful 'league table' for you is one you create yourself: you can record the key points from a range of university/ subject rankings but do include all the other important factors listed on these pages.
- 📖 **Employability:** Some degree courses are vocational and others may give you partial exemption from professional qualifications if they are accredited by a relevant body. Some courses include relevant work experience which helps you to network and find employment. All universities collect 'destination statistics' and you can see these on discoveruni.gov.uk or you can research graduate employment prospects by subject or university at <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/courses/top-10-subjects-for-graduate-employability> or <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/universities/top-10-uk-universities>.

You can also look at career options with your course at www.prospects.ac.uk, www.allaboutcareers.com and www.icould.com but remember that most graduate level jobs are not concerned with your degree subject knowledge – what's important is that you are a graduate.

And please remember that **a degree alone does not guarantee you a job!** At university, you should be further developing the **transferrable skills** that employers want - enterprise and initiative, team-work, leadership, ICT literacy, organisation, resilience, motivation, perseverance, decision-making, communication and presentational skills. This means that you should take advantage of every opportunity to get involved in – and organise – clubs and societies, volunteering, charity work and part-time work.

How to Get 5 Out of 5 University Offers

1. Choose courses with entry requirements that play to your strengths

When it comes to selecting your five choices, make sure that you have a selection of different entry requirements. If you have high-predicted grades, by all means choose a range of universities where you meet the higher entry requirements. But choose them to play to your strengths:

- universities that ask for an overall points score [e.g. 36 points] are a good choice if you are doing well at both HL and SL subjects
- universities that ask for an overall points score and for specific HL points [e.g. 666] are a good choice if you are confident in your HL subjects

However, you should apply to at least one course with a lower entry requirement to increase your chances of receiving five out of five offers. You need to have an honest and realistic conversation with your teachers [and yourself] about how many UCAS points you are actually going to get – put dreams aside and consider worst case scenario! How many points might you drop if the exams go badly? In which case, consider an insurance choice that is a grade or two below your aspirational choice.

2. Tailor your personal statement to your five choices

You may have glossed over this whilst reading up on course pages but universities are very clear on the types of students they are looking for. They often describe key skills that they look for or that students will need on the course, such as resilience or determination. Read up on what your choices look for in applicants and what they expect of their students. Once you've taken note of these qualities, ask yourself the following:

- What do my five choices have in common?
- What do certain choices have that makes them unique from the others?
- How can I target these qualities in my personal statement?

The benefit of this method is that you won't make general points about your suitability. You will target exactly what your choices are looking for specifically. Following this will ensure that your five choices make you an offer.

3. Apply as early as you can

Although there isn't a cap on the number of students a university can accept, **it may reflect well on you if you submit your application earlier rather than later**. The added bonus is that you could hear back from your university early while other students are still getting things sorted to meet the January deadline.

4. Visit your choices virtually and ask questions

By attending virtual open days, you not only get to see the university but you also get to ask questions. Often, students ask about accommodation, societies and what to do around the local area. Whilst these are important, in order to get all five offers, here is what you should be asking:

- What do you look for in an applicant?
- What does a successful personal statement look like?
- How can I stand out amongst other applicants?
- What makes this course unique?

These questions will help you later on when it comes to applying. If you know the fundamentals, you will be in the best position to receive an offer from the choices you visited.

5. Get the predicted grades you can achieve

The process of predicting your grades starts in Year 12. However, if you are capable of achieving higher grades, talk to your teacher about it and do extra essays, extra timed tests This must be done before October for early entry applicants; the rest of you have the mock exams to prove it. Generally, the higher your predicted grades, the better your chances are for getting an offer due to the fierce level of competition for places. Obviously, however, you need to be realistic with grades you can actually achieve, and your teachers will not just 'bump up' if they feel it will become impossible to attain – and remember point 1 on this list!



The best ways to carry out research into courses and universities

- **All HE institutions have extensive websites** for both the university and individual departments. There are links from the **UCAS website** [www.ucas.com] to all institutions.
- Universities and departments provide **prospectuses**, which they will send you. Most will have them available online. Some Students' Unions also publish an 'alternative' prospectus written by the students themselves.
- **Key Information Sets** contain important data about contact hours, student satisfaction levels [including quality of teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, learning resources and facilities], accommodation costs and graduate employment figures. KIS can be found on **Discover Uni** [discoveruni.gov.uk] and there is also a link to the site on each institution's course page on the UCAS website.
- You can take a virtual university tour on many university websites, www.ucas.com/virtual-tours_and_unionviewcom on Youtube. Many universities also have 'a day in the life at...' Youtube videos. All universities are holding Virtual **Open Days** [see pages 9-12] - you can find out the dates at www.ucas.com/opensdays and on university websites. 85% of students applying in 2018 said that Open Days and visits to universities were the most influential factor in their decision-making to help them get a feel for the general ambience of the campus/university town. Hopefully, you will be able to make an actual visit later in the year.
- Many universities offer virtual **taster courses** which include lectures and workshops - have a look at www.ucas.com/taster-course to find out more.
- **www.university.which.co.uk** provides excellent information about subjects/ degree courses/ graduate employability and offers advice about writing personal statements; you can download a free 'Getting into Uni' guide, browse all universities or see how many applicants received an offer for your course last year.
- **www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk** gives you university/ subject league tables and graduate prospects, and offers advice on a wide range of matters from student finance to Oxbridge applications.
- **www.whatuni.com** gives you university profiles, compares degree course details and offers advice on many topics from selecting subjects to choosing accommodation.
- **www.student.hut.com** has been described as a Trip Adviser for universities and reviews all aspects of student life from courses to nightlife.
- **Learn from others:** You can talk to students currently studying your subject at your chosen university by using Unibuddy on the UCAS Hub. There are also blogs [www.ucas.com/connect/blogs], case studies [www.ucas.com/connect/case-studies] and videos [www.ucas.com/videos] on the UCAS website and their social media platforms. Talk to staff and students at Virtual Open Days. Contact the university to find out more - email addresses and phone numbers are on department websites.

Virtual Open Days – Top Tips

In the present climate, universities are trying their best to accommodate both current and potential students. They're attempting to maintain as much normality as possible, and offering virtual open days is one of these ways.

There's a list of virtual tours and videos from universities and colleges at www.ucas.com › ... › **Open days and events** so you can see what it's like on campus and get your questions answered. Some universities [eg UCL] are asking you to register so check the websites of all universities you're interested in.

You'll still want to visit the university when that becomes safe to do so but, in the meantime, here are a few thoughts on how to make the most of a virtual experience.

Keep exploring

While it may be impossible to wander around the campus at the moment, you can still see it in all its glory. Virtual tours are an option for almost every university in the UK. They let you watch videos and use interactive maps so you can get a feel of the university and its surroundings. Make sure you see examples of accommodation, lecture halls and the city/town streets. This way, you can get as good a feel of the place as possible.

Do as many tours as you can

Thanks to the lack of travel, it's possible to sit in the comfort of your own room and visit a wide range of different universities without worrying about the cost and practicalities of travelling the entire country. Use this to your advantage to compare and contrast each city/town and university. Think about the accommodation and facilities, and how each university ticks the boxes you're looking for.

Ask lots of questions

Most universities will offer tours with current students and staff. Use the opportunity to ask as many questions as you can, as you would at a regular open day. You won't embarrass yourself or be remembered as the one who asked a silly question. You could ask parents/ family to log in too and ask questions relevant to them. This way, no one is embarrassed!

However, some questions might be really individual, so best to take them offline or directly message the university. Don't forget, the university may not be able to give you concrete dates or assurances on issues like exam grades and campus opening dates, but things will become clearer and universities will keep you updated.

"Treat it as a live chat and Q&A rather than an open day. You won't really get the feel of a campus or accommodation online, or really grasp how far the accommodation is from lectures, or how safe the area is where the university is based (although the [CUG crime tables](#) can help), so this is more of a fact finding mission." James Seymour, University of Gloucestershire

Don't fixate on Coronavirus

There's understandably a lot of concern about how different universities have coped with the coronavirus pandemic – how it'll change the current landscape for your degree, and how your exam results and application will fare in the new system for 2022. However, it's good to remember that going to university is a three-year (or more) commitment. There are a lot of other things to ask, to see and to compare that'll affect your experience and lifestyle over your entire time there. By all means, ask what you need to know about the current situation, but be aware of things to consider outside of the immediate situation, such as clubs and societies, and transport links.

Call a friend

Perhaps a friend is looking at the same universities, or similar subjects. It might be a good idea to chat with them and discuss what you've seen at different universities so far. Two people looking at the same place may notice different things, so you can discuss the pros and cons together.

Remember to focus

Whatever happens with coronavirus and universities, you should still keep the plans you have for your future and continue your university application and journey as planned. Any changes will be clearly communicated and new deadlines/dates confirmed as and when the information becomes available.

Preparation before Open Days

The following questions, compiled by UCAS, are designed to get you thinking about what you want from your student experience. Considering your answers should help you clarify what you want from your university experience, and what to ask on the day to find out which courses and universities suit your wishes.

Near or far? You may need to look for a local course so that you can stay with your family or you might be happy to move to wherever you need to go to do the right course. Or is it the draw of living in another country that appeals most?

Town or country? Would you like to live in the centre of a big city to be close to all the facilities it has to offer, or do you prefer a rural location?

Transport Where are the transport links? How much does it cost? Will there be a lot of travel between campuses? Parking spaces, bike racks?

Small or large? Do you like the idea of studying in a really large university, where there are large lecture theatres and something for everybody, or would you prefer a small site where you can get to know everyone?

Campus or non-campus? Are you bothered whether you're on a campus, where everything you need is located on one site, or do you like the idea of moving around between sites?

What is the quality of study facilities, books and learning resources like? Very important if you're going to be spending a lot of time there.

Hall of residence or rented accommodation? Does it have guaranteed institution-managed accommodation for first year students? Or for international students? What's the cost of staying in halls? How easy is it to find a student house to live in? Is there help for international students to find accommodation if you are moving their from abroad?

Is there a range of activities, clubs and societies? Many universities boast a vast array of clubs and societies from rowing and tennis to debating and religious clubs, but some will be more active than others so check with the students' union and ask students when you visit on an open day.

Nightlife and social life? Can you be assured of getting the social life you're after? Does it have an active students' union? What events does the students' union arrange? Are there clubs and pubs nearby that you want to go to?

Male to female ratio? Are you interested in whether there are more females on campus than males or vice versa?

What sports facilities are there? Many universities have gyms, playing fields and swimming pools on site, which are important if you like an active life. Some universities offer sports courses as an extra credit towards your degree – is this something that would be of interest to you? Other facilities to consider are library, lecture theatres and seminar rooms, computer labs, bars and clubs, launderettes and shops!

What is the university's reputation? The reputation of a university or college can be very subjective, and it's important to choose a university that suits you rather than trying to fit into one that might not work for you. However, if you are thinking about your CV and the kudos a certain university will bring then perhaps reputation is important for you. Maybe certain courses at specific universities are better regarded by an area of business or industry than others. There are many resources which you can use to find the best places to study by subject area and department.

Does it have expert teaching staff? What is the student to staff ratio? Are the academic staff experts in their field? How was the subject you were interested in rated in the latest Research Assessment Exercise (soon to be the Research Excellence Framework)? What teaching methods are used?

What's the general ambience of the university and the university town? How does it feel when you 'visit'? Does it have a view or a stunning piece of architecture that would inspire you? Does it have the space and support to be who you want it to be?

Questions to ask on Virtual Open Days

By attending open days, you not only get to see the university but you also get to ask questions. Often, students ask about accommodation, societies and what to do around the local area. Whilst these are important, in order to get an offer, here is what you should be asking:

- What do you look for in an applicant?
- What does a successful personal statement look like?
- How can I stand out amongst other applicants?
- What makes this course unique?

These questions will help you later on when it comes to applying. If you know the fundamentals, you will be in the best position to receive an offer from the choices you visited.

Getting onto the course

- How many places are available for the course and how many applications are received each year?
- What is the usual application process for this course? Will there be an interview/ admissions test?
- What personal and academic qualities/ skills do you look for when considering applicants?
- Is the university department flexible if I do not quite make the entry requirements on Results Day?
- Was the course in Clearing last year?

The course itself

- How is the course assessed – how much is by exam and how much is by continuous assessment?
- How is the course taught - through lectures, tutorials, seminars, laboratory work, other?

- What are the contact hours?
- Is it possible to study abroad or have a work placement in industry for part of the course?
- Is the course accredited by a relevant professional body?
- How flexible is the course? Is there scope to pursue special interests?
- How easy is it to change course or to study a subsidiary course?
- What is the staff to student ratio?
- Will I be expected to buy materials or equipment?
- Do departments give help or advice about obtaining internships?

The university or college

- Is it based on one site?
- Do students 'live in'?
- Can all first years be accommodated?
- How far away is the accommodation from the institution?
- What is the typical cost of accommodation?
- What is the typical cost of living?
- Is public transport available from the halls of residence to lectures? If yes, what does it cost?
- Do I need to have personal transport - a car/motorbike/cycle? If so, can it be parked?
- Do you offer scholarships/ bursaries? How are these awarded?

Student facilities

- What are the student services like - students' union, clubs, job shop, societies, volunteering options and sports/recreation facilities?
- What support services are provided (eg careers service, counselling, finance and medical)?
- What support facilities exist for students with additional needs?
- What safety and security measures are in place?
- What is the nearest town/ city like?

The future

- Where are graduates from this course likely to find employment?
- What exemptions does this course give with respect to professional qualifications?

Costs/financial

- How much is course equipment/ a year abroad/ field trips...?

Finding out more

- If I have any specific questions in the future, who should I contact at your institution?
- What are the arrangements for making a personal visit?
- Is there an 'alternative' student prospectus? How do I get one?

Another useful resource is **Unibuddy**. This tool enables you to chat to students taking your subject at a range of universities. [Sign up to the UCAS Hub](#), select the 'Unibuddy' tile, filter by course, uni or home country and start chatting! It is totally safe! The universities choose their own ambassadors who are trained by Unibuddy and there is a rigorous monitoring system which protects all students involved.



Planning and writing your personal statement

This is one of the most important parts of your application and you will get detailed information from us to support you. There is additional support for Medics, Dentists, Vets and Oxbridge applicants. All documents will be made available for parents on the school website.



Universities want answers to these sorts of questions:

- Have you chosen the right subject[s] for the right reasons?
- Does your personal statement confirm your enthusiasm/ depth of interest in the subject[s]?
- Have you studied independently and beyond the syllabus?
- Are you motivated and committed?
- Can you survive an intense and pressured atmosphere?
- Do you possess good numeracy and literacy skills?
- Do you have a range of interests/ aptitudes and have you developed a range of soft skills?

In your personal statement, you will need to:

- explain your academic interest in and enthusiasm for your subject[s] on and beyond your school course; it is recommended that you have three modules/ topics you're enthusiastic about, each with evidence [books, articles, podcasts, documentaries, exchanges, visits, field work ...] of engagement and reflection;
- include evidence too that shows you understand what is required to study the course eg if applying for Psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is;
- explain the other academic skills which make you suitable for the course and how these have been demonstrated in your subjects;
- tell the university about the well-rounded person you are and the transferrable skills you've developed by participating in extra-curricular activities or having posts of responsibility;
- show evidence of forward planning [optional] - where you hope the degree will lead you or possible career intentions.

Check the websites of the individual universities you are applying to as they often have their own guidance about personal statements. Be warned - it's not an easy piece of writing and it could take five - ten drafts!

Wider reading and other preparation over the summer holiday

Evidence of this is important in your personal statement to convince the university about your genuine interest in - and excitement about - your chosen subject. It is also important if you are called for an interview. There are thousands of [MOOCs](#) you could do for free.

Admissions Tests?

Find out if you need to take an admissions test. These are often required for more competitive courses and for many you need to have taken the test before your application will be considered. The main tests currently used include BMAT (for some medical and veterinary courses); UCAT (for most Medical Schools); LNAT (the National Admissions Test for Law). Oxford and Cambridge universities also have entrance tests. **Get practising over the summer!**

You will be responsible for entering yourself for UCAT. Most other entrance exams, including 4 November BMAT, are run through the school. If you need to take any of these tests, it is very important that you make arrangements in September with Ms Hall and Mr Rawson, the Exams Officer. If you miss the deadline to apply to sit these exams, you will have to wait another twelve months – late applications are not accepted by the examination bodies.

The situation is changing fast and up-to-date information is available on the websites and on UCAS (www.ucas.com/admission-tests). **It is your responsibility to ensure you have made arrangements for the necessary tests and know exactly what each university requires.**

The UCAS application

Successful applications:

- Good GCSE profile
- Enthusiasm for and knowledge of the subject – above and beyond syllabus – shown in an error-free personal statement
- Coherent application [eg no inconsistencies between predicted grades and entry requirements of university choices]
- Work experience where appropriate
- Success in admission tests [eg LNAT, BMAT, UCAT, Oxbridge tests ...]
- Our reference
- Good predicted grades

Applications are begun on-line on the UCAS website [www.ucas.com › [ucas-undergraduate-apply-and-track](http://www.ucas.com/ucas-undergraduate-apply-and-track)] in the summer term of Year 12 and completed in September in Year 13. You will be given a step-by-step guide to doing this. Note that you don't need to complete it in one go and you will need to make a credit/debit card payment (£26 for five university choices) at the end of the process.

The application requires:

- Personal details [name, address, email address, nationality, date of birth]
- Employment
- Student Finance option [02 for most of you if you're applying for a loan]
- All your GCSE and other relevant results
- A list of the subjects you take
- The five institutions/ courses you are applying for – remember to combine ambition with realism and have *at least* one with a lower offer as an insurance choice. These choices appear alphabetically, not in any order of preference, and universities do not see where else you have applied until much later in the process when you have made your firm and insurance choices. This ensures that each university decides independently whether to offer a place and what conditions, if any, to attach to an offer.
- Your personal statement.

If there is a personal circumstance you think the university should be aware of, and there isn't a question about it on the application form, you can ask your referee to include it in the reference. Examples of such **contextual** information include disability, health/ mental health condition, parenting or care responsibility, estrangement from family, any time spent in care, official refugee status, widening participation activities ...

Click on 'Send to Referee' and see your Learning Coordinator him that you have done so. The school then attaches the reference and the form is sent to UCAS electronically. You will receive confirmation that they have received it and are processing it.

The UCAS deadlines of 15 October and 15 January are for schools, not students! Any students applying to Oxford or Cambridge must have completed their personal statement by 24th September and their UCAS form by 04th

October. This is also the deadline for all students applying to study Medicine, Veterinary Science or Dentistry . The 15 October deadline is non-negotiable. No late applications will be sent off. If you are applying to competitive courses at competitive universities [e.g. Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Warwick], you may also want to apply by this early deadline. All other students **MUST** complete their form by **26th November** to allow up to two weeks for the school to process it, update, and attach the reference. Remember that the earlier you complete your form, the greater the chances of receiving early offers from your chosen institutions.

[If you are applying to a conservatoire, the UCAS deadline is 1 October for music courses and 15 January for dance, drama and stage production courses. There are exceptions so check the websites carefully.]

Interviews

Most universities will make an offer [or rejection] based on your UCAS form – few universities now have the time or resources to interview applicants. However, exceptions to this include Oxford and Cambridge, some courses at UCL, Warwick and a few other institutions – the likelihood will normally be listed on university websites. It is very important that you prepare carefully for interview in advance. You should also talk to relevant subject teachers, your form tutor, and arrange a mock interview with Mr Naqvi.

Tracking your Application

UCAS Track allows you to follow the progress of your application 24/7. You'll be able to sign in at any time with the Personal ID in your welcome email, along with the password you used when applying. Whenever there's an update [interview, offer ...], an email will be sent to the address supplied in your application – so **make sure you keep your contact details up-to-date**. UCAS send your results to your chosen universities so you will also see in Track if your place is confirmed on Results Day.

Receiving offers – choosing or declining

You will begin receiving offers [or rejections] from universities once they have received and processed your form. Some respond quickly, others may take several months! UCAS will email you to let you know something has changed in Track – so it's vital you regularly check your emails. Invitations to submit a portfolio or attend an interview may be received in Track or directly from the university or college. Please keep Ms Hall and Mr Naqvi and your form tutor informed about your offers or rejections.

Universities will either make you a conditional offer [i.e. they will offer you a place if you achieve the required UCAS points for example, in July], or occasionally an unconditional offer or they could reject you outright.

Some universities will turn a conditional offer into an unconditional one if you make them your first choice. It can be tempting to accept this but make sure it is the right university for you and that you don't take your foot off the pedal in terms of exam revision – you're a Level results will go with you on your CV into your future world of work!

Once you have had replies from all the universities you have applied to, you will be required by UCAS to accept **one firmly** as your **first choice**.

If you firmly accept an **unconditional** offer, you are committing yourself to take up that place and cannot hold an insurance choice. Nor are you eligible for Adjustment or Clearing. Read this blog post if you are considering accepting an unconditional offer – www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/accepting-unconditional-offer-0.

If you firmly accept a **conditional** offer, you are committing yourself to that place if you get the points but you can **also** accept a second offer as an **insurance** choice – this choice should have lower entry requirements in case you don't meet the conditions of your firm choice. You will be committed to going to that insurance university if you do not meet the requirements for your first choice university.

All other offers must then be declined. This must be done by 5 May [tbc] for most students - students' deadlines vary according to a rolling programme of dates depending on how quickly your chosen universities respond. Your date could be different from your friends' deadline. **NB** If you don't reply to your offers in Track on or before your reply date, UCAS will decline them on your behalf. This means you will lose all your offers.

The UCAS application process complies with consumer law and the Competition and Markets Authority's advice. This means you have 14 days to change your mind after you accept an offer, which constitutes a contractual decision.

Before making the important decision about your firm and insurance offer, make sure that you:

- understand the conditions of the offer [read the small print] – if you're not sure, contact the university;
- visit the university if you haven't already done so;
- discuss any individual needs with the university – for example, if you have a disability or mental health needs – so that everything is in place when you start the course;
- check the tuition fees, accommodation costs and any available bursaries/ scholarships;
- compare the offers thoroughly, taking into account location/ accommodation/ course content/ teaching style and assessment/ opportunities/ KIS/ graduate employment prospects ... You do have to want to go to your insurance choice university if necessary!

The university is also required to make information available under consumer protection legislation so do read and understand this information before making a decision. If you do not receive it or you're unclear about anything, you should contact the university to ask for further advice. You can find out more at www.ucas.com/your-consumer-rights.

What is 'Extra'?

Competition is tough and even the best students don't always get the offers they hoped for. If you do not receive any offers or you turn down the ones you have received, then you can make further choices [one at a time] through Extra. Courses available through Extra are posted on the UCAS website from 25 February to 5 July 2022. This means you can look for another course without having to wait for Clearing and you can completely change direction if you want – from Latin to Sports Science – but it is necessary to check with each university to ensure they still have places and you may have to submit a new personal statement. Add the course details in Track. Universities have twenty-one days to respond.

Direct Contact Service

UCAS's Direct Contact Service is available from the end of February right through until mid-September. It's designed to help those of you who find yourselves without a university place by allowing universities to make direct contact and talk to you about a place on a course they think might be suitable.

Results Day

A Level results are usually published in the second week of August. UCAS receives your exam results and makes them available to your chosen universities who then check the offer details and confirm that the conditions have been met. If the university confirms your place, this will be shown clearly in Track.

If a university confirms a 'firmly accepted' offer, you are committed to taking up that place. The insurance choice, if any, becomes redundant. If your first choice university does not confirm a 'firmly accepted' offer and you meet the conditions of your insurance choice, you are committed to take up that insurance place.

If you end up committed to an insurance place and do not want it, you will have to withdraw your application altogether, using the self-release tool on UCAS which will enter you into Clearing.

If you don't meet the conditions of either your firm or insurance choice, you may still have your place confirmed. This is at the discretion of the university and depends on a number of factors: how far off your results are from the offer, other students' exam results and the popularity of the course. If your results have been published and no decision has been made, it's often worth calling the university to talk to them about your application. You may have to wait until A Level Results Day to get confirmation.

If you don't meet the conditions of your offer, a university may offer an alternative such as: a different course; a deferred entry place [2023 instead of 2022]; a different point of entry [a 'year zero' foundation year instead of year

one of a degree course]. If this happens, you have five days to decide if you want to accept the alternative offered. All these options are explained in Track.

NB Universities will want proof of all qualifications entered in Apply (e.g. GCSEs).

The Post 16 Team will be in school on Results Day and we are available via email if you need to contact us after this date.

What is Clearing?

If you do not have your firm or insurance places confirmed, you will automatically go into Clearing where you can find alternative university courses which have spaces. Clearing begins on 6 July and widens on A'Level Results Day, 10th August. If your exam results are reasonable and you're flexible about location or even subject, there's a good chance you'll find another course. It used to be that students were scrambling to get places in Clearing – now it is universities competing for the best students they can get: if they don't fill those places in Clearing, they won't fill them at all. Moreover, there is no stigma to applying through clearing: you'll never be treated any differently from students who got in first time round.



Clearing vacancies are updated regularly by universities so if you don't find the course you're looking for straight away, try again later. Clearing Plus is a new tool introduced in 2020 which helps students further.

Once you find something you like, contact the university to find out more about the course and see if they will offer you a place. You must do this yourselves – admissions tutors want to speak to you, not your parents or teachers.

You must have permission from a university or college before you add a Clearing choice in Track. If you don't, your application may be delayed.

Once a Clearing choice has been added, you cannot change it until the university has made a decision. If you're accepted, you are firmly committed to that course. If you are unsuccessful, you can repeat the process.

There is more information on www.ucas.com/clearing. Clearing can be a stressful time but the UCAS team will be available to support you.

It is vital that you do not go on holiday when your examination results are published in case you find yourself in Clearing.

What is Adjustment?

If you **meet** and **exceed** the conditions of your **firm choice**, you'll be eligible to use **Adjustment**

www.ucas.com/adjustment

UCAS



This is a brief two-week period beginning with the publication of A'Level results in August that allows students who have exceeded their predicted grades a chance to look for a course at a more competitive university while retaining their existing place. There are no Adjustment vacancy lists: you have five working days to contact and negotiate with other universities to see if they have spare places. It's up to the universities to verify whether you have 'met and exceeded' your conditional firm offer. [For examples of meeting and exceeding offers, go to www.ucas.com/adjustment.] If you don't find an alternative course you like, you keep the place you gained on Results Day. If you apply through Adjustment, be aware that you do go to the back of the accommodation queue!



UCAS Application Timeline of Key Dates 2021 – 2022	
Summer Term 2021	<p>The UCAS search tool was updated on 5 May 2021 for courses starting in 2022.</p> <p>You'll be able to register and start your UCAS Undergraduate application in the UCAS Apply 2022 system from 19 May, but you won't be able to submit until the autumn term.</p> <p>You'll provide information to help your form tutor write your reference.</p> <p>You should start booking Virtual Open Days. Most universities will hold them – they are advertised on their web sites and on UCAS. Check if you need to register.</p> <p>You will all begin planning your Personal Statement in June. Begin a personal statement log. <i>Medics</i> and Oxbridge applicants will be given additional advice and need to write the first draft of the personal statement in by the 15th of July.</p> <p>Consider the subject[s] you want to study and research university courses on the UCAS website. Please look carefully at entry requirements, course content and assessment, type of university/ location/ accommodation/ costs and bursaries and student satisfaction [Unistats/ Discover Uni], and record the information [a spreadsheet is useful] so that you can compare it later when you need to narrow your choices down to five university courses.</p> <p>Applications to overseas universities - please contact Mr Naqvi as soon as possible.</p> <p>Non-EU nationals applying to British universities should check their residency status and also contact Mr Naqvi. You might not be eligible for Tuition or Maintenance Loans and be charged hefty costs as an 'overseas' student if you do not have a British passport or 'indefinite leave to remain'.</p> <p>MEDICS, DON'T FORGET: Book UKCAT and begin practising the test. Registration opened on the 28th of June testing will probably happen in August. <i>Registration for September BMAT opens as usual in June NB You can only sit BMAT once and we offer this in school.</i></p>
August 2021	<p>The summer holiday is a time for wider reading [essential for Personal Statements and interviews] and to research and practise entrance tests. Check very carefully if you need to take one.</p>
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September 2021	<p>Register your interest to sit BMAT LNAT examinations with Mr Rawson and Mr Naqvi</p> <p>Final Personal Statements for all OXBRIDGE Med/Den/Vet Sci applicants must be sent to Ms Hall and Mr Naqvi. You may well have redrafted this up to 10 times before that date. Your referee should also be sent your final copy to support the writing of your reference</p> <p>UCAS Mock Examinations</p>
October 2021	5 th October for OXBRIDGE Med/Den/Vet Sci to finalise their UCAS Applications. October 15 th these are sent to UCAS. If you are applying for a highly competitive course it is advisable that you also observe this timeline
November 2021	BMAT LNAT examinations take place. All personal statements and UCAS applications completed by the 26 th of November
November 2021 – March 2022	You may be called to attend interviews and / or sit additional entrance tests depending on your university course.
January 2022	Mock Examinations School deadline for the submission of all UCAS applications NB. This is the School's deadline not yours!
May – June 202	<p>There is a rolling programme of dates by which you have to accept one university as your first choice offer and select a second as an 'insurance' offer in case you fail to meet the grades.</p> <p>If you receive all decisions by 31 March, reply by 5 May</p> <p>If you receive all decisions by 6 May, reply by 3 June [unless using Extra to find a place]</p>
July 5 2022	The deadline for Student Finance applications
August 2022	A Level Results. Clearing and Adjustment widens

Student Finance

Cost should not be the decisive factor in your decision to go to university but it will influence it and you need to be aware of the financial implications of your choices.

The Student Finance website [\[www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance\]](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance) provides comprehensive information. You may also want to have a look at the following to help you get on top of budgets and money matters:

- <https://www.ucas.com/finance/undergraduate-tuition-fees-and-student-loans>
- <https://www.which.co.uk/money/university-and-student-finance/student-finance>
- [The big fat guide to student finance](#)
- <https://www.savesthestudent.org/tools>
- www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/students/. Martin Lewis busts the myths surrounding student loans and offers advice on student bank accounts and how to stretch your loan.

There are two key costs that students incur:

- 🎓 Tuition fees
- 🎓 Maintenance [accommodation, food, books, other living expenses]

Tuition Fees

In 2020/21 Universities in England are charging up to £9250 for tuition fees. Scottish universities are charging similar fees to English students. Tuition fees at Welsh universities are currently capped at £9000.

- 🎓 Tuition fees do **not** have to be paid up front.
- 🎓 Students are entitled to apply for a Student Loan for Fees. This loan is not means tested [i.e. it is not dependent on parents' income] and is paid directly to the universities on your behalf.
- 🎓 Because of the way the system works, taking out a loan as a parent to cover the cost of fees and avoid the student getting into debt will almost always work out more expensive in the long run.

Maintenance: 'Cost of Living'

Students are entitled to apply for a Maintenance Loan. The amount you can borrow depends on your household income, your course and where you live and study.

Latest information 2020/ 21:

- Up to £7, 747 for students living at home.
- Up to £9,203 for students living away from home and studying outside London.
- Up to £12,010 for students living away from home and studying in London.
- Up to £10,539 for students studying overseas as part of their UK course.

Bursaries and Scholarships

With the new higher fees, far more bursaries and scholarships are available. You should investigate carefully what is out there for subjects and universities you are interested in.

Many students from low income households or care backgrounds or particular postcode districts do not have to pay the full 'headline' fee.

There are NHS bursaries and also merit scholarships available to those who excel at a sport or music or achieve high grades. Kent, for example, offers £2000 per annum to any IB student who attains a minimum of 35 points and 15 at HL.

OFFA suggests that some 400,000 students benefit from bursaries and scholarships - so research what is out there on university websites, <https://www.thanksmo.com/> and www.thescholarshipub.org.uk.

Repayment of loans

Repayments are based on your future income, not what you borrow, and you will start repaying in April 2025. The current thresholds for repayment are of £26,575 a year, £2,214 a month or £511 a week. For example, if your annual income is £28,800 and you are paid a regular monthly wage, each month your income is £2,400 (£28,800 divided by 12). This is over the Plan 2 monthly threshold of £2,214. Your income is £186 over the threshold (£2,400 minus £2,214). You will pay back £16 (9% of £186) each month. The following table [2020] gives examples of what your repayments might be.

Yearly income before tax	Monthly income before tax	Monthly repayment
£25,575	£2,131	£0
£27,575	£2,297	£7.50
£30,575	£2,547	£30
£36,575	£3,047	£75
£41,575	£3,464	£112.50

-  If you're employed, repayments will be deducted from your income (the same as it is with tax and national insurance contributions). If you're self-employed, separate arrangements are in place with HMRC to make your repayments.

-  If you stop working or your income drops below £26,575, your repayments will stop and only start again when your income is over £26,575 a year. If you never get a job earning over the threshold, it means you won't have to repay a penny.

-  While the loans do accrue interest, any outstanding debt still owed after thirty years is written off, unless you have defaulted on your loan.

-  Student loans do not affect your credit rating or your ability to get a mortgage.

How do I apply for student support?

The on-line application can be completed from March 2022 onwards for courses starting in October 2022. You can do this whether or not you have received an offer for a place yet.

There will be a session in school to help you apply for student finance in March.

You make a single application through Student Finance Direct at www.gov.uk/studentfinance. They also have a helpful general phone line on 0845 6077577. The deadline for applications is 25 May 2022 [tbc].



Although applying to university is increasingly expensive for students and their families, please do not let this be a reason for not considering a university degree and do ask for help if you are at all concerned or wish to discuss the matter further.

Are you an EU student? Your rights to live in the UK will not change until 31 December 2020. If you want to stay in the UK you'll have until at least 30 June 2021 to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.

At present, EU students have 'home fee status' in the UK. This means that if you're an EU student, you pay the same fees as students from the part of the UK where your university is located (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). You can also apply for UK student loans.

The fee and loan status of EU students starting from 2021 onwards is still to be confirmed. At the moment it differs depending on where in the UK you are looking to study. Check for [updates](#).

Other options to consider

Do you want to combine learning with earning? Go for an apprenticeship

An apprenticeship is a real job with training so you can earn while you learn and gain a nationally recognised qualification. It can take between one and five years to complete and you can choose from job roles in a range of industries, from engineering to accountancy, retail to IT, public relations to veterinary nursing.

Degree Apprenticeship is a new education route bringing together the best of higher and vocational training. These courses are similar to [higher apprenticeships](#) but they provide an opportunity to gain a full bachelor's (Level 6) or master's degree (Level 7). Courses are designed in partnership with employers, with part-time study at a university or college. They can take between 3 to 6 years to complete, depending on the level of the course. One obvious appeal is that there are no student fees. However, as degree apprenticeships are new, there is only a limited number of vacancies available at the moment and there may be competition from adults already in work. If you are considering this route, you should keep your options open by making an application to a full-time degree course at university through UCAS at the same time. Read more about the different types of apprenticeships available on www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship, www.ucas.com/apprenticeships and <http://www.allaboutschooleavers.co.uk> and see Mr S Williams in H3 if you have any questions about apprenticeship schemes.

Do you want to study abroad?

Lower tuition fees have made European universities much more financially competitive with their UK counterparts. Many of them are actively recruiting British students! They are well worth considering in addition to an application to British universities – but watch this space as nothing has been confirmed post-Brexit.

You should consider two factors carefully at this stage before making a decision:

- **Cost:** tuition fees might be lower in Europe but there are the 'hidden' costs of travel and health insurance and no access to cheap 'up front' student loans.
- **Language:** most European universities teach in their native language so you need to research which ones offer courses taught in English. You'll have to learn the language if you have a work placement as part of your course and it would be useful if you want to socialise off-campus in the city!



If you are considering a degree in America, you should have already started your preparations and you'll be familiar with the Fulbright Commission website which tells you everything you need to know. The school will support your application but you need to be aware that getting into university in the US is fiercely competitive so you need to be realistic in terms of your academic performance. The top 15 universities in the USA are the equivalent to the top 3 in the UK (Cambridge, Oxford and Imperial). The top 100 universities in the USA are equivalent to the top 5% in the UK.

Unless you can get a scholarship from the university or Sutton Trust, studying in the USA is also much more expensive than the UK! The average cost of studying at an American university is £33,215 a year, but it varies widely from £18,000 to £50,000 depending on the university and course. On average, students are graduating with £101,505 worth of debt. Considering that most undergraduate courses are four years long [some six or more], you also need to consider the cost of living in America compared to the UK. The website [Infozee](#) puts the estimate at about £450 - 650 per month for rent, utilities, food, and other living expenses. Another website, [Studying in the US](#), puts the estimate at about £970.

If you are seriously considering applying to any overseas university, please speak to Ms Hall as soon as possible.

Do you want to take a gap year?

Many people like to take a gap year once they have completed their degree. However, some of you may be considering a year out in 2021 - 22 to travel, to gain work experience, to work overseas etc. A productive gap year can enhance your CV and your higher education application but it does need research and careful planning so you don't just waste your time. A number of organisations help

students to plan gap years and you should apply early if you are interested – they get booked up quickly. There are many crucial things to consider such as cost, value and practicalities such as flights, visas, insurance and vaccinations.



Before deciding on a gap year, look carefully at the course requirements and the attitudes of the universities you are interested in – some courses [eg many Maths and Science-based courses] may prefer you **not** to take a break in your study. You should always contact relevant university Admissions Tutors to check whether they consider deferred applications - the course may not even be offered the following year. Consider too that there may still be travel restrictions in place

There are two ways to apply to university if you want to take a gap year:

- Apply this year for deferred entry [i.e. to start a course in September 2023]. You will need to state why you are having a year-out on your UCAS form and indicate what you are planning to do [universities like students to be constructive if they are having time out].
- Wait until you get your A Level results then apply in the autumn of 2022 for a course beginning in 2023. While you are welcome to do this and can still use the school's UCAS service, remember that it might be less convenient for you to apply this way as you have already left school and are presumably starting your gap year activities.

www.ucas.com/gap-year

www.gapyear.co.uk

www.statravel.co.uk

www.summerjobs.com

www.lonelyplanet.com

www.roughguides.com

Parents/ guardians, what can you do to support your son/ daughter?

There's no one right way to handle the university application process as a parent: your ideal level and type of involvement will depend on your child's individual needs. However, students definitely benefit when their parents have an understanding of the UCAS process and can offer practical and emotional support.

- Use the UCAS Resources for Parents [eg Parent Guide, Parent Information tool, monthly parent newsletters] to be informed about all university matters from the application process to student finance.
- See what guidance is provided by the school for your son/ daughter. We will email you at key points in the year and direct you to information on the school website.



- 📅 Become familiar with the timeline [pages 18 - 19] so that you are aware of each stage of the university application process and can help maintain schedules. You can make great secretarial aides: help with creating folders, paper and electronic files, an application checklist or timetable, especially if your son/ daughter is prone to procrastination! Remind them of key deadline dates and encourage a sense of urgency but, obviously, don't micromanage them as this can cause undue stress for everyone!
- 📅 Encourage them to keep focused on their studies and to take their interest in their chosen subject beyond the syllabus. It is a good idea to keep a reflective log to record what they have learned from their reading/ viewing/ visiting. This will help them complete their personal statement in September.

What can they do to develop their knowledge about their subject beyond the syllabus?

1. Newspapers and news websites will help them keep up to date with the latest developments and thinking in their subject. Many newspapers focus on different topic areas (for example, science) on certain days of the week. Encourage them to share their views with you on what they read.
2. Specialist periodicals and magazines provide further insight into the subject eg The Psychologist and New Scientist. Often these magazines have really good websites so a subscription is not always necessary and, as a school, we subscribe to certain publications that are available to the students.
3. Some universities publish sample reading lists for modules studied in the first year. This material can be a useful introduction to the subject at university level.
4. There are some very useful websites that provide subject resources. Bright Knowledge is a bank of resources with articles and revision guides for most subject areas. Many universities have developed online learning programmes that are designed to support students' learning about particular subjects. Future Learn has a list of some of the programmes available.
5. Encourage them not just to read but to experience the subject too - to download lectures and podcasts and to visit virtually museums, theatres and places relevant to the subject. Many universities have podcasts and lectures available on their websites. They could also tune into TED Talks, YouTube and Radio 4: 'In Our Time' covers most subjects. Discover Downing [www.dow.cam.ac.uk › *undergraduate-study* › *discover-downing*] gives you access you many of these.
6. Students can also access subject-specific outreach opportunities at universities. These can include residential summer schools, master classes, public lectures and online resources. Information about these programmes is available on university websites.

- 📅 Also encourage them to keep up with their extra-curricular activities if they can and/ or book future work experience/ volunteering is necessary. These activities will develop their transferable skills and be useful for their personal statement. The most important thing is reflection so encourage them to reflect on the skills and knowledge they have gained in a section of their reflective log.
- 📅 They may also need a reminder over the summer to book, practise and/ or take admissions tests.
- 📅 Please do **not** book family holidays at key times next year **eg A Level Exam Results Day in the 2nd week of August**
- 📅 The most important thing is that your child finds the right course at the right university where he/ she will thrive academically and be happy. Have ongoing discussions with them about subjects, courses and universities/ degree apprenticeships – and be a good listener. You can support them in the decisions they make when researching their options, narrowing down choices and, later, accepting places, and you can help them think pragmatically about their skills, strengths, likely exam grades, aspirations ... You can make them aware of the 'bigger picture' and also the finer details [eg entry requirements, accommodation costs ...] – teenagers often ignore the small print! They may need emotional support at stressful times of the year eg mock exams or if they receive rejections from universities. They will also need your support if planning a gap year.

- 📺 Ask them if they have read everything that has been sent to them, including the small print!
- 📺 Remind them to book mock interview practice, if appropriate, with the appropriate teacher at school.
- 📺 Check their UCAS application form with them for glaring errors.
- 📺 Having said all that, it is their application and you need to balance giving guidance and support with giving them independence.
- 📺 Provide your child with the information that is needed to make the application for student funding support.
- 📺 Encourage them to research scholarships and bursaries at their chosen universities.
- 📺 Encourage them to start doing some of the things they'll have to do when they move away next year: learn some healthy recipes or how to make their favourite meal from home; how to change a plug or do the laundry without shrinking it or turning everything denim blue; how to organize and keep safe personal and academic records [medical, insurance etc.] and keep track of all Internet accounts, including logins and passwords ...
- 📺 Lastly, it is important to keep stress at bay – your own as well as theirs!

Some of the common pitfalls to avoid:

- 📺 Basing your advice on your own experience of university. Universities and student life are constantly changing!
- 📺 Suggesting certain courses will always lead to a good job. Are you sure? Have a look at the [Graduate Prospects](#).
- 📺 Suggesting certain universities are best for a particular subject. Again, are you sure? See the Complete University Guide's [League Tables](#) - something you previously believed may have changed.
- 📺 Projecting your own desires. You may love being a doctor, but that doesn't mean your child wants to be one also. Students switching courses usually say that they never wanted to do their initial subject but felt their family expected it.
- 📺 Wanting them to choose only local universities so that they can live at home. This limits the range of courses and universities available and your child might not learn as much about independent living; continued life with the family might bring its own strains and pressures.
- 📺 Doing too much. If you have questions that can only be answered by an admissions office, get your child to call. It helps the student develop confidence when speaking professionally to adults and take control of the admissions process.

Who can answer your questions at school and at UCAS?

Preparing for what you want to do when you leave school is very exciting but can also seem daunting. Please do ask if you have any questions or problems – your form tutor is the first port of call, but also discuss issues with your subject teachers and the following members of staff:

- 📺 Ms Hall [Assistant Headteacher]
- 📺 Miss Forest [Year 12 Learning Coordinator]
- 📺 Mr Naqvi [Year 13 Learning Coordinator]
- 📺 Ms Hart [Deputy Head]
- 📺 Mr Clayton [Assistant Headteacher]
- 📺 Mr Ghataura [Most Able Coordinator]
- 📺 Mrs Kyriacou [Literacy Coordinator]
- 📺 Ms Laing [Apprenticeships]

You can also post a question to UCAS on Facebook or tweet on @ucas_online.

Once you have registered and have your personal ID number, you can ring UCAS on 0371 468 0 468.

Finally

I hope this booklet is useful. I will be emailing you later in the summer, in September and in March to give you additional information that the students will receive at those times. If you need any further advice or have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch and ask.