

Parent Guide to University Applications

We organise a number of talks and events during Year 12 to help your son/daughter decide whether they want to apply to university and - if so - how to go about doing so. This brief guide is designed to give you an overview of that process.

How do you apply to university?

Applications to Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) are usually made through an organisation called UCAS. Students fill out an online application form using the 'Apply' section of the UCAS website, which includes personal details, examinations they have taken and a 'Personal Statement' of up to 4,000 characters (about a side of A4) to explain why they want to apply for a particular course and the skills and qualifications they have to support their application.

How many can you apply to?

Students can choose up to 5 courses (usually the same/similar course at 5 different universities, but this could be different courses at the same university). For 2020 applications, the fee will be £20 for a single choice or £25 for 2-5 choices. For students applying to Conservatoires the fees are £25.

How do you choose a course?

There are thousands of courses available at hundreds of universities and colleges. Students need to make sure they choose their courses for the right reasons and do plenty of research before deciding where to go. The 'Course Search' part of the UCAS website is a good place to start. After that individual institution websites should be studied as degrees vary hugely from place to place - both in terms of content, course structure, examination schedule and teaching style. There are many joint courses; some courses have a 'sandwich' year in industry; others offer the opportunity to go abroad for a year.

Key questions for students to keep in mind are:

- Which subjects interest me?
- What are my talents?
- What job would I like to do after university or college?
- Which academic skills would I like to improve?

How do students choose a university or college?

There are many factors to consider. Whether or not the institution does the course you want should be the first consideration, looking particularly at the modules studied. After that, the reputation for that subject, the percentage of satisfied students or graduate employment records, cost of fees and distance from home are all important. Another important factor is the accommodation on offer - whether on a campus or a city site, rural or urban together with a 'feel' for the place. A useful website to help students choose is <http://university.which.co.uk/> or you might be interested to look at university league tables e.g. in The Times or reviews from the National Student Survey <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/> We also encourage students and parents to attend Open Days; we suggest a maximum of 3 days in school time, and many are now at weekends.

What grades do you need?

The 'UCAS Tariff' is the system for allocating points to qualifications used for entry to higher education. Universities and colleges use the UCAS Tariff to make comparisons between applicants with different qualifications. Tariff points or grades are often used in entry requirements, although other factors are often taken into account. Many of the top universities now require ABB grades, or 128 points. The table below shows the tariff:

Extended Project Qualification	AS level	A level	New Tariff points	BTEC Extended Diploma (Triple Award)	BTEC or CTEC Diploma (Double Award)	BTEC Subsidiary Diploma or CTEC Extended Certificate or CTEC Introductory Diploma (Single award)	BTEC Certificate (1 year award)
			168	D*D*D*			
			160	D*D*D			
			152	D*DD			
			144	DDD			
			128	DDM			
			112	DMM	D*D*		
			104		D*D		
			96	MMM	DD		
			80	MMP	DM		
			64	MPP	MM		
		A*	56			D*	
		A	48	PPP	MP	D	
		B	40				
		C	32		PP	M	
A*			28				D*
A		D	24				D
B	A		20				
C	B	E	16			P	M
D	C		12				
	D		10				
E			8				P
	E		6				

D = Distinction Star, D=Distinction, M=Merit, P=Pass*

Examples:

- You get BBC in 3 A-levels. This would equal $40+40+32 = 112$ points.
- You get Distinction (D) in a BTEC and AB in 2 A-levels. This would equal $48+48+40 = 136$ points.

Sometimes universities specify a particular grade as part of a points offer (e.g. "120 points to include a B in Chemistry"). Some universities may accept EPQ as part of an offer.

It is advisable to apply for courses with a range of tariffs with reference to a student's predicted grades.

The 'Entry Profile' gives more information about the qualifications and experience needed to apply for a particular course. Many require English and Maths GCSE at grade 4 or above, and particular A-levels e.g. Chemistry for a Medicine degree. Some teaching courses require a minimum of 10 days school experience.

Some courses also require specific admissions tests. Medicine, for example, at most universities requires taking either the UKCAT or BMAT tests; some institutions ask for the LNAT test for Law, and applications to Oxbridge may require further tests.

When to apply?

Students can start applying for courses starting in 2020 from 5th September 2019. The deadline for most courses is 15th January 2020, however applications for Oxbridge, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Veterinary Science and Dentistry are early (15th October 2019) and some Art and Design courses are later (24th March 2020).

In school, we encourage students to register with UCAS in June/July of Year 12 in order to start completing the application form and begin drafting a personal statement, especially if they will be applying by 15th October. Students can still apply after 15th January 2020, but universities will only look at applicants if they still have places left. Obviously it is better to apply earlier rather than later, as most universities start giving out offers as soon as they receive applications.

Who writes students' references?

At KSHS the form tutor writes the reference, but we ask for detailed contributions from specific subject teachers to help with this. For example, a student applying for History will have a detailed paragraph composed by the History department which will be incorporated into a more general reference; tutors use the Year 12 subject reports as well as information about their tutees' extra-curricular activities and the knowledge they have acquired about individual students over their time in Year 12. References are then checked and amended if necessary by the Head of Sixth Form.

What support does school give applicants?

We give talks about the UCAS process to introduce students to the application procedure but then arrange various talks from universities - on how to choose a course, write a good personal statement, student life etc. We often have ex-students come back to talk about their experiences too. We produce a guidance booklet for students and plenty of help is available on the UCAS website. We encourage students to seek advice from subject teachers and their form tutor when drafting (and re-drafting) the personal statement. Each student then has a half-hour appointment with the Head of Sixth Form to go through their application, including the personal statement and reference. We also offer specialist support for the very competitive Oxbridge courses and every student has the opportunity to have a mock interview if it is likely they will need one.

What happens once the applications are received by UCAS?

Students will begin to get offers from universities shortly after applying, many without an interview. Some courses or institutions are likely to require an interview, e.g. those funded by the NHS, Oxbridge applications, teaching courses etc. Offers are generally received by the end of March, but this can be as late as May, and students then have a personal deadline by which to choose a 'firm' offer (1st choice) and an 'insurance' offer (2nd choice). Usually these will be conditional on achieving specific grades or points, although sometimes universities do give out unconditional offers. Students choose which offers to accept via the UCAS website, usually by early May. If they are rejected by all 5 institutions or they change their minds, students can go through UCAS 'Extra' which allows them to apply for one course at a time according to where there are still vacancies (listed on the UCAS website from late February).

What does it cost to go to university?

Many HEI's are charging £9,250 per year for fees, with living costs on top. It is expensive. However, the ONS surveys suggests that over a lifetime, a graduate can earn on average £480,000 more than a non-graduate. Tuition fees are covered by a student loan, which is paid back over 30 years once a graduate starts earning more than £25,000 a year. It is effectively a graduate tax as the money is taken at source, along with tax and national insurance, and the amount repaid each month varies according to the amount earned. Whatever debt has not been repaid after 30 years is written off.

Maintenance loans are also available for living costs. The maximum amounts vary depending on where the student lives e.g. up to £7,529 if at home or up to £11,672 if in London. They are means tested so the precise amount a student is eligible for is calculated on a sliding scale, with students from lower-income households being eligible for more. The implication here is that students from better-off households will be supported to some extent by their parents.

For more information and to apply (when the time comes) visit Student Finance England www.gov.uk/studentfinance. UCAS also has a lot of guidance: <https://www.ucas.com/student-finance-england/living-costs-full-time-students>

What happens if students don't get the required grades/points?

It is vitally important that students are available on A-level results day (13th August 2020) in case they don't achieve the grades needed for their course. In many cases, if a single grade is dropped, they may still be accepted but it depends on each individual HEI's criteria as well as on the performance of other applicants. If a grade is missed by a few marks it might be worth getting an exam paper re-marked. If students have not met the tariff for either their firm or their insurance offer then they can enter 'Clearing' – a process where students look for vacancies in the national press or online and then phone HEIs direct to see if they are able to accept them. They may be required to attend an interview at this stage. If no offer is made, then school will support them in re-applying the following year should they wish to.

Further information

UCAS has an excellent **website** with a dedicated Parents' Section. You can download and read through their extensive guidance and sign up for regular newsletters or tweets at: www.ucas.com/parents

In the meantime, if you have any other questions, please do get in touch either by e-mail or telephone and I will endeavour to answer your query.

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