

# Parent Guide to University Applications

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This brief guide is designed to give you an overview of the process for applying to university. It supplements information given directly to students.

## How do you apply to university?

Applications to Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) are usually made through an organisation called UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). 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 2022 applications, the fee will be £20 for a single choice or £26 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; some are Masters Degrees.

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. This year some of those are likely to be virtual open days, which does make things more difficult. UCAS offer a 'chat to students at uni' section on their website, which may also give some insights.

## 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. Predicted grades will be given to students by their teachers in September 2021.

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 UCAT or BMAT tests; some institutions ask for the LNAT test for Law, and applications to Oxbridge may require further tests. Students must register (and pay if applicable) for these themselves and either sit them at a driving test centre or in school.

## **When to apply?**

Students can start applying for courses starting in 2022 from 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The deadline for most courses is 15<sup>th</sup> January 2022, however for Music applications to Conservatoires it is 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, and the deadline for Oxbridge, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Veterinary Science and Dentistry is 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Some Art and Design courses are later (March 2022).

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 15<sup>th</sup> October. Students can still apply after 15<sup>th</sup> January 2022, 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?**

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 information about their tutees' extra-curricular activities and the knowledge they have acquired about individual students over their time in Year 12. All students are encouraged to share their skills and competences with their tutor using 'Unifrog', our Careers and university platform. References are then checked and amended if necessary by the Head of Sixth Form.

## **What support does school give applicants?**

We usually 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. We will look to see how we can adapt our support remotely where possible.

## **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 (1<sup>st</sup> choice) and an 'insurance' offer (2<sup>nd</sup> 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 the repayment threshold - currently £26,575 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. Graduates pay 9% of their income above the repayment threshold. So, if you earn a salary of £27,000 you only pay £3 a month.

Maintenance loans are also available for living costs. The maximum amounts vary depending on where the student lives e.g. up to £7,987 if at home or up to £12,382 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](http://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 (usually mid-August) 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](http://www.ucas.com/parents)

In the meantime, if you have any other questions, please do get in touch and we will endeavour to answer your query.

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