

Your Place at University

**Finding your way through the
university application process**

A guide for **Students**

Introduction

Going to university is an exciting experience. However, the application process can be confusing, with so much information available and so many choices to make. This guide is not intended to provide step by step instructions on how to apply, but is instead a companion for you as you go through the application process. It aims to demystify some of the common areas of confusion and to help you avoid the pitfalls.

Some students have to overcome significant barriers to reach university. Many universities view applications from these students in a positive way. They recognise that such applicants must have high levels of motivation and determination to achieve what they have achieved.

In researching this guide we talked to staff in universities to understand what it is they really look for in potential students, as well as teachers and tutors in schools and colleges who support students through the process of applying to university. We have also held discussion groups with students who have gone through, or are getting ready to go through, the application process themselves.

The key messages are clear:

- Research courses and universities thoroughly
- Apply early
- Make sure your application is the best that it can be

We hope you find this guide useful and we wish you every success in your studies and future career.



Acknowledgements

Researched and written by Vanessa Wennerstrom from Aimhigher Kent and Medway.

We are extremely grateful to students and staff from the many institutions who have contributed in the following ways:

Steering Group for the production of this guide:- Linda Bishopp – Communications Manager, Aimhigher Kent and Medway Partnership; Amanda Byard – Careers Guidance Adviser, Medway Youth Trust Connexions; Donna Coyte – Progression Curriculum Manager, University of Kent; Lauren Crowley – Vice President (Education), Kent Union and National Executive Councillor, NUS; Felicity Dunworth – Director, Aimhigher Kent and Medway Partnership; Andrew Hills – HE Curriculum Development Officer, Canterbury College; Libby Lines – Outreach Worker, Open University in the South East; Jan Martin – Director, Aimhigher Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; Jane Spurgin – Director of Development, Kent Association of Further Education Colleges; Victoria Standing – Head of Sixth Form, The Isle of Sheppey Academy; Rebecca Towner – Guidance Development Officer, Connexions Kent & Medway; Helen Wood – President, Kent Union.

Interviews:- Donna Coyte – Progression Curriculum Manager, University of Kent; Steven Holdcroft – Head of Recruitment, University of Kent; Frances James – Schools Administrator, Kent County Council and Aimhigher Kent and Medway Partnership; Andy Kesson – Lecturer, University of Kent; Anne Lamb – Learning Mentor, Virtual School Kent; Andrew Martin – Careers Coordinator, Archbishop's School; Floriane Peycelon – Head of Sixth Form, Sir Roger Manwood's School; Nic Pike – Head of Admissions, University for the Creative Arts; Anna Rogers – Universities and Careers Advisor, Tonbridge School; John Slater – Director of Student Recruitment, Canterbury Christ Church University; Julian Skyrme – Head of Undergraduate Recruitment and Widening Participation, University of Manchester; Jessica Soames – Aimhigher Project Officer, Thanet College; Ian Tawse – Student Services Manager, Open University in the South East; Paul Teulon – Head of Student Recruitment, University of Oxford; Helen Wood – President, Kent Union.

Student Focus Group:- Year 12 and 13 students from the Isle of Sheppey Academy.

Institutions who completed questionnaires and/or provided information or support:- Canterbury College; Castle Community College; Dover Christ Church Academy; Hadlow College; The Isle of Sheppey Academy; K College; Malling Holmesdale Federation; The Marlowe Academy; Pent Valley School; Sittingbourne Community College.



4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
19
20

Overview of the application process

Selecting the right course for you

Selecting the right university for you

When to submit your application

Avoiding common mistakes

Writing your personal statement

Interviews

Taking a year out

What to do when you receive an offer

What to do if you don't receive an offer

Summary checklist

Glossary of terms

Where to go for more information

Application process calendar

Left: Some of the winning entries from the Aimhigher Kent and Medway 'Inspire to Aimhigher' Art Competition 2010. Top – Sophie Ashby, Spires Academy (Creativity Award); Middle – Jenna Turner, Dartford Technology College (Highly Commended); Bottom – Hazel Williams, Thamesview School (Category 2 Runner Up).

Overview of the application process

Top tip...

- For a good overview of the application process, in bite-size chunks, have a look at the video guides on the UCAS website. Available here: www.ucas.tv

Important notes...

- Different universities, and even different courses within the same university, place varying amounts of emphasis on each part of the application. It is therefore vital that every part of your application is the best that you can make it.
- The application process will probably take longer than you expect, so don't rush through it in one go. You can save each section as you complete it and come back to it later.
- After submission, remember to monitor your application online so as not to miss important deadlines in response to calls to interviews, requests for additional information, or offers of places. This monitoring is done through 'Track' on the UCAS website. Also, keep an eye on your post as some universities still prefer to contact students direct through the Royal Mail post.

In a nutshell

Applications to almost all UK full-time undergraduate degree courses are dealt with online through **UCAS**. UCAS is the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. UCAS does not make any decisions about allocating places at university; it is just a service that manages the application process. Your school or college will give you a '**buzzword**' which you will use when you register on the UCAS website. Even before you are set up, you should take some time to browse the site to familiarise yourself with the information and guidance that is available:

www.ucas.ac.uk

The UCAS website is also a good starting point for your research. It will enable you to **search for courses** and look at their entry profiles, but you should see this as a directory, rather than your only source of course information.

Applying online through UCAS allows you to apply for up to five university courses with just **one form**. The form asks for:

- Personal details (name, contact details etc.)
- The universities and courses you want to apply for
- The schools and colleges you have attended
- The qualifications you already have as well as those you still have to take
- Details of any employment
- Your personal statement
- A reference from your school or college.

The grades you achieve in your qualifications may be converted into points known as **UCAS points**. Some universities just look at grades, some just look at total points, and some look at a combination. This system is known as the **UCAS tariff**. You can find a fuller explanation of how the tariff works, as well as a full list of the current points for each grade and qualification here:

www.ucas.ac.uk/students/ucas_tariff

Universities will make **offers of places** based on the achievement of certain **grades and/or points**. The information listed under 'entry requirements' for each course is an indication of the typical grades the university will look for before considering making an offer. You should look at these guideline grades to see if you can realistically achieve those before you apply. On certain courses you may also be required to take an **admissions test**, or entrance exam.

There is a **fee** to be paid when you submit your application. Details of this are available on the UCAS website.

For **part-time** degree courses, you will need to apply directly to the university. Also, if you wish to study for any course with the **Open University**, you will currently need to apply directly to them. The Open University does not have entry requirements for most of its courses, so it is important to contact them for **guidance** on course choice if you are thinking of applying to them:

www.open.ac.uk/18to24



Selecting the right course for you

Top tip...

- To get a really good idea of what you would be doing in your first year, ask the university for a copy of the current first year timetable for the course you are interested in applying for.

Important notes...

- Don't assume that just because a course has the same name at two different universities, that the content will be the same.
- Students say that one of the main reasons for dropping out of university is that the course wasn't what they expected it to be. It is vital to make sure you are fully aware of what will be covered on the course.
- The courses you choose to apply for on your UCAS form should all be similar. Otherwise your personal statement will not be applicable to all your choices, or will be too general to be of value.

Research, research, research

Selecting the right course for you can seem like a daunting prospect. Lots of people will probably be telling you what they think you should do. Whilst suggestions and advice from others can be useful, you need to be sure that whatever choice you make is right for you.

This process **should not be rushed**. You need to start thinking about and researching possible courses a long time before you submit your application.

Think about what **subjects you have enjoyed** studying at school or college, but don't restrict yourself. For each subject you have already studied, there could be hundreds of different courses that build on that subject area. For instance, an interest in history could point you towards an archaeology course.

Or you may want to study something that is **completely different** to anything you have studied previously. Many degree courses don't require you to have studied that subject already. If there is something that fascinates you, then there is probably a university course that covers it. Do take time to investigate.

Some professional careers require **specific degrees** to be taken. If you have a particular career in mind, you will need to find out if this is the case. Otherwise, many jobs and careers ask that applicants have a degree, but without specifying the subject. You are then free to choose subjects that build on your **areas of interest**.

Whatever subject you decide upon, can you answer 'yes' to the following questions?

- Am I passionate about this subject?
- Am I interested enough in this subject to study it for at least the next 3 years?
- Do I already have some knowledge about this subject?
- Have I thought about what type of career a degree in this subject could lead to?
- Will I be able to meet the entry requirements for the course? Some courses have specific work experience requirements as well as qualifications.

If you are happy with your subject choice, or have at least narrowed the choices down, it is important to allow yourself plenty of time to research fully the courses available in that subject area, and most importantly, their content.

Also keep in mind that degrees are **not all equal** in terms of structure and requirements. Many aspects can vary from course to course, such as:

- The number of lectures
- The number and type of assignments required
- The balance between practice and theory
- The recommended study time
- How the course is assessed (exams/coursework)

Look at **'Where to go for more information'** at the back of this guide for details of websites that can help you to select the right course for you. Also look at the course information on individual university and college websites.



Selecting the right university for you

Top tip...

- You can access virtual tours of many universities online, so search for those if you're not able to visit the universities you would like to apply to.

Important notes...

- When making your university selections on the UCAS application form, think very carefully about all of the courses you are applying for. Don't assume that you will get your first or second choice, so make sure you would be happy if you got your fifth.
- The financial costs will vary from university to university. As part of your research, find out what the different fee packages and bursaries are for the universities you are interested in. Look at what other financial support may be available to you; it could be different depending on where or what you study. Also take some time to investigate what the living costs will be there. Student accommodation costs, for example, can vary significantly.



Home or away

Selecting the right course is only part of the research process. You will also need to spend considerable time researching the universities that run the course you are interested in. You will want to find out which ones meet your **personal needs and wants**. Make sure you are clear on exactly where the courses you are interested in are being run; they may not always be at the main campus. Questions to ask yourself:

- Do I want to stay close to home or do I want to move away?
- What type of facilities do I want, both within the university and in the local area?
- Do I have any special or particular needs that require support?

Try to **visit the universities** you want to apply to. Visiting is an important part of the decision process. Attend open days if you can the year before you apply. Whilst you are visiting the university, also take time to visit the local area. Consider whether it is a place you would be happy to live in for at least the next three years.

If visiting is really not possible, then it is vital to **research them on the internet thoroughly**. If you can't find the answers you need, don't be afraid to phone the universities and talk to them. It is much better to find out in advance if the university is going to meet your requirements.

Think about what **your priorities** are for your university experience as a whole. Staying close to home might have financial benefits, but you won't have the experience of living on or near the campus with other students. Or if you have a long daily commute to your university, your travel costs may be considerable, and you may miss out on some evening social activities. Think carefully about what you want from your university experience, and how best you can achieve that.

If you intend to work part time whilst you are at university, then you should also take time to find out what **employment opportunities** there are on or near the university campus.

It is understandable that you may be a bit anxious about going off to a university where you don't know anyone, but try not to be influenced by which one your friends might be going to. You will make new friends at university, so it is important that you choose the university that is **right for you**, not the one that is right for somebody else.



When to submit your application

Top tip...

- Check our handy calendar at the back of this guide to help you schedule your time and avoid missing key deadlines.

Important notes...

- Your school or college will need time to write your reference, and will probably not do this until you have completed your sections of the application. Give them plenty of time, and let them know when you have finished your sections of the form.

A winning entry from the Aimhigher Kent and Medway 'Inspire to Aimhigher' Art Competition 2009. **Lauren Dudley, Holmesdale Technology College.**



Early

Universities receive thousands of applications, and will usually start allocating places as soon as they start receiving them. You don't want your form to be at the bottom of the pile. Give yourself the best chance you can by submitting **well before the deadline**.

The earlier you submit your application, the longer you are giving the university to consider it. An early application will also give the impression that you are **well organised**.

Some schools and colleges have **internal deadlines** for getting applications completed, which could be two or three months before the current UCAS mid-January deadline. This ensures that the school or college have enough time to write your reference. If they don't have an internal deadline, then set your own. Don't leave it until the last minute.

Some courses and universities have **different deadlines**. If you are applying for medicine, dentistry or veterinary courses, or to Oxford or Cambridge, the deadline is currently 15 October. The Open University has more than one deadline during the year, depending on the course, so check the individual course details on their website.

If you are currently on a one-year college course, you might not be able to submit your application very early on. The tutors writing your reference will need **time to get to know you**, and have marked some of your work, before they can write an honest and accurate reference. However, you should still be able to get your application submitted before Christmas, and this is what you should aim for.

Avoiding common mistakes

Top tip...

- After submitting your UCAS application, you may be asked by a university to send additional items by post to support your application. This could be extra pieces of work, or another reference. Always send these by Recorded Delivery – it only costs a little bit more, but items can get lost in the post, or at the university. It is important for you to be able to prove you posted them, and track where they are.

Important notes...

- At some stage you will need to show your exam certificates for the qualifications that you are using as part of the entry requirements. Make sure you know where they are. If they are lost you will need to pay for new copies, which you can apply for online from whichever examining board awarded them. These can take up to 12 weeks to arrive.



Check, re-check and check again

On the UCAS application form, you will need to select the **qualifications** you are currently taking, and those you have already taken, from drop down lists. Take great care to make sure you select the right qualifications from the list. Many students make mistakes on this part of the form and it can cause problems later on. Ask your tutor or teacher if you're not sure.

Be sure every part of your application is **completed** before submitting it. Check it more than once.

Errors in **grammar and punctuation** can make your application look sloppy, and it is always harder to spot your own mistakes. Ask someone else to check what you have written before you submit it.

Some university degrees, particularly those leading to the medical or caring professions, require you to have had some relevant **work experience** prior to starting the degree. If you are interested in that type of career, you need to start arranging work experience the year before you apply to university. If you have left it late, you can still refer to planned work experience in your personal statement, but it looks much better if you have already done it.

You will be asked for your **nationality** on the UCAS form. It is very important to get this right. Your nationality is what is written on your passport if you have one. UK applicants will then also be asked for their national identity and their ethnic origin. These are based on how you choose to classify yourself and so may not be the same as your official nationality. Your national identity and ethnic origin are used for monitoring purposes only and will be not be seen or used by the universities.

The application form asks whether you have any unspent **criminal convictions**. If you are not sure about this, read the explanatory notes on the UCAS website as to what is classed as an unspent criminal conviction. If you are still not sure, you should be able to clarify your own situation with your local police station. It is important to get this right, there can be implications both for selecting 'yes' if you do not, or selecting 'no' if you do. If you do have an unspent conviction, don't assume that this will rule you out of getting on the course. The university will however probably ask for fuller information to assess whether or not it has any bearing on your application. It will be more relevant on some courses than others.

Remember that **GCSEs** are specified as a requirement on most university courses, even though they aren't counted as UCAS tariff points. The entry requirements may state for instance that 5 A*toC GCSEs are required, or that GCSE English and Maths at C or above are required. Having a higher level qualification does not overrule the need to have the required GCSEs, so you will need to make sure you retake any GCSEs needed to fill any gaps you may have.

Make sure the person writing your **reference** knows why it is that you are applying for that particular course. This will help them in writing your reference.

When you **receive an offer**, check it very carefully. Note particularly such things as where the course is being run. For instance, a university may make the offer for a course being run within a college, or at a different campus, so don't just look at who is making the offer and assume the course is being run at their main campus.

Writing your personal statement

Top tip...

- The online UCAS form will time-out after a certain period of inactivity, so you could lose your work if this happens. Type your personal statement in a separate document and paste it into the form only when you are completely happy that it is finished.

Important notes...

- Your personal statement should be forward looking rather than backward looking. Don't simply list the things you have done in the past. Instead reflect on, and write about, what you have learned from them, and how this will help in your future study or career plans.
- If you are called to attend an interview, you will probably be asked about things you have written in your personal statement. Don't include anything in your statement that you wouldn't be able to talk more fully about.
- You must be yourself in your statement, but the best self that you can be. This could be your only chance to sell yourself to the university, but don't exaggerate or lie. Universities read thousands of personal statements every year and are very good at spotting the fake ones.



Be yourself, but your best self

You can only submit one personal statement for all of your choices, so make sure it is **applicable to all** of them. For example don't specifically name the course you are applying for if it is not called by the same name on all of your choices.

Don't list your qualifications in your personal statement as you will already have done that elsewhere on the form. However, do highlight any particular **academic achievements**.

Keep descriptions of your **outside interests and work experience** to a minimum within your personal statement. Mention them where they answer at least one of the following:

- Are they relevant to your course choice, particularly in terms of what you have learnt from them that will help in your course? Remember that relevant work experience is a specific requirement on some courses.
- Have you developed skills from them that will assist you at university? For example working as part of a team, or communication skills?
- Did they require a certain amount of time and commitment from you alongside your studies? Your workload at university will be heavy, so the ability to take on several commitments and manage your time effectively is an important skill.

Your **passion** for the subject has to come through because your application is likely to be read by someone who is passionate about that subject. But don't just say you are passionate, think about how you can show it. Can you say something interesting about a particular aspect of the subject? Is there a particular person in the field that you admire? If so, why? Be specific to show that you understand your subject.

You want to stand out from other applicants, so **avoid bland statements** such as 'I have been interested in this subject since I was a child'. Think about what it is that interests you about it and why.

If you look at any examples of personal statements, don't be tempted to copy chunks from them. UCAS uses an electronic system which checks personal statements for similarities against those already in the system, and from other websites. Directly copying what someone else has written and passing it off as your own is **plagiarism**, and universities do not tolerate it. Remember it is a personal statement, so it must be personal to you.

Make sure your personal statement includes:

- Your reasons for choosing a particular course. Be specific but ensure that what you say applies to all of your choices.
- If applicable, what your longer term career plans are, and how this course would fit in to those. This is particularly important if you are applying for a vocational course. However if you are applying for a non-vocational course, don't feel you have to make up some career plans if you don't yet have any.
- Interests and work experience, as mentioned above. Remember to be specific, for example, don't just say that you enjoy reading, say what you enjoy reading and why.

Interviews

Top tip...

- Plan answers to the following three questions as they are likely to come up at the interview in one form or another:

- **Why do you want to do this course?**

- **Why do you want to come to this university?**

- **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**

Think particularly carefully about your weaknesses. Don't try to claim that you have no weaknesses because this will not be believable. Instead think about how you could frame them in a positive way by talking about how you manage or overcome them.

Important notes...

- The interviewer will be looking for your genuine passion for the subject to come through, so remind yourself what it is about the subject that fascinates you.
- Don't let yourself down on the day of the interview; remember that you are presenting your best self. Dress smartly, arrive on time and turn off your mobile phone.

It's all in the preparation

Some universities, or some departments within universities, interview everyone before offering a place. Others may just interview some applicants, where they need to find out more about them before deciding whether to make an offer. Either way, if you are required to attend an interview, it is vital that you are **well prepared**.

Carefully **read the information** you have been given about your interview. Are you required to prepare anything ahead of time? Will you be given any tests on the day? The universities aren't looking to spring surprises on you. They should let you know what to expect. They won't be impressed if you are not prepared for things that they have told you about beforehand.

Re-read the application you submitted and be sure you can **talk openly** and widely about any aspect of it. Think about how you can justify what you have said, and what else you can add.

Plan your journey to the university in advance, and make sure you allow plenty of time on the day. Remember that you can probably save money on train tickets by booking them ahead of time. Have the phone number of the department or person you are meeting at the university easily to hand when you travel, just in case you do experience any delays.

If your school or college offers **practice interviews**, then take them. This will really help to prepare you for what to expect on the day. If they are not offered, then ask whether anyone could do some with you. It is a good idea if you can have some practice interviews with someone who has specialist knowledge of the subject you want to study so that they can question your thinking around that subject.

The interviewer will want to see that you match the person in your application, and what else you have to offer. Giving 'yes' and 'no' answers to questions will not show them anything. You need to be able to **expand and elaborate** on answers. The interviewer will be genuinely interested in your opinions, and will want to hear what you have to say, so make the most of the opportunity.

Do research on **current issues** relating to the course subject, and mention this when appropriate at the interview. This shows you are taking an active interest in the subject.

The interviewer won't expect you to know everything there is to know, so don't panic if you can't answer a question. Some university interviewers will deliberately ask very challenging questions. What they are looking for is **potential** - the ability and willingness to learn and develop.

Even though you will have done some **research on the university** prior to your UCAS application, you'll need to refresh your knowledge before the interview. You will probably have done research on many universities, so you want to be sure you haven't confused them.

At the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. Always have **two or three questions** ready to ask. If your questions get answered during the course of the interview, don't re-ask them, but instead say that you did have a couple of questions concerning X and Y and that these have been covered. Asking questions will show you are keen and interested in the university, but do take time to think about what it is you really want to know.



Taking a year out

Top tip...

- Before making a deferred entry application, check directly with the university that they will still be running that course the following year. Also check that they will allow a deferred entry application for that course as not all do.

Important notes...

- Some subjects, such as maths and the sciences, require knowledge to be carried forward from previous study into degree level study. If you decide to defer for a year, are you confident you can retain that knowledge for a year?
- It is better to apply for deferred entry whilst you are still in the 6th form at school or at college than to just apply from scratch the following year. While you are at school or college, there will be support available to you in applying to university. It may be harder to access support after you have left. The motivation to return to study after a year will also be greater if you have already secured your place.



Deferring your studies

You may decide to make a **deferred application** to university. That means you apply a year ahead, with the intention of taking a year off from study, before starting your course. This is often referred to as a gap year.

There are **different reasons** for wanting to do this. You may want to travel, or you may need to work for a year to save for university. There are benefits to taking a year out but it needs to be thought about carefully. For instance, are you sure you will really want to return to study after a year? Sometimes it is better to keep going with your studies rather than taking a year away.

If it is just that you feel you **need a break** from studying, remember that you will already have a break of a few months. Your college or year 13 course will have finished in early summer and your university course will probably start in October. Those three or four months may be all the break you need. Your summer holiday breaks at university will be much longer than they were at school.

It could be that a **change in your personal circumstances** means that you need to take a year away from study. Even if you have already received an offer of a university place, you can ask for it to be deferred to the following year if you suddenly find you will be unable to start the course at that time.

If you are applying for deferred entry, mention **what you will be doing** during that year in your personal statement. This will help them in their decision about whether to offer you a place.

You will also need to consider the **financial implications** of deferring your studies. The course costs for example may be different the following year.

Keep in mind that even if you are applying for deferred entry, the **same deadlines** apply for getting your UCAS application in.



What to do when you receive an offer

Top tip...

- If you are having difficulty choosing between your offers, review the priorities you had when you made your application. Ask yourself:
 - **What was it about these courses/universities that made me select them in the first place?**
 - **How close do they come to meeting my main priorities?**
 - **How likely am I to meet the requirements on conditional offers?**Draw up a list of points 'for' and 'against' for each offer.

Important notes...

- You cannot change your mind once you have accepted or declined offers. Be absolutely sure before you make your choices.
- If you would like to stay in the university halls of residence, you should apply for your accommodation as soon as you have accepted an offer. Remember to do this for your insurance acceptance place as well as your firm acceptance place.
- You may also be required to select course modules at this time. Again you should do this for both your firm and your insurance place.
- Even unconditional offers may have certain requirements attached to them before you can start your course. This usually relates to evidence they need to see such as exam certificates, medical conditions or financial arrangements. Do read details of offers carefully to ensure you provide what is required.



Decisions and action

You will **receive official notification** of offers from UCAS, and may also hear directly from the university. Remember you can monitor the progress of your application at any time through Track on the UCAS website.

You will need to **take time to consider** your offers, and if possible talk these through with the school or college staff who helped you with your application. Do check the details of your offer carefully to be sure you are clear on what is being offered, and where. You will use Track to respond to your offers. Make sure you respond by the deadline.

Offers will be **conditional or unconditional**. A conditional offer means the university will be happy to offer you a place if you meet certain conditions. The conditions usually relate to exam results. An unconditional offer means you have already met their requirements, and they are offering you a place.

If you receive more than one conditional offer, you should select a first choice and a second choice. These are known as **firm acceptance** and **insurance acceptance**. You can only accept one firm and one insurance, so you must then decline any others if you receive more than two offers.

The insurance acceptance is there in case you do not meet the requirements for your first choice firm acceptance. This usually means therefore that your insurance place should have **lower requirements** than your firm first choice. You do not have to select an insurance place but it is wise to do so in case you do not meet the requirements of your firm choice.

If you **accept an unconditional offer**, you are committing yourself to it, and cannot also select an insurance place. You must therefore decline all other offers.

If your exam results exceed those required by your firmly accepted conditional offer, then you have five days to look for an alternative course if you wish to do so without losing your confirmed place. This is known as **adjustment** and is done through **Clearing** on the UCAS website.



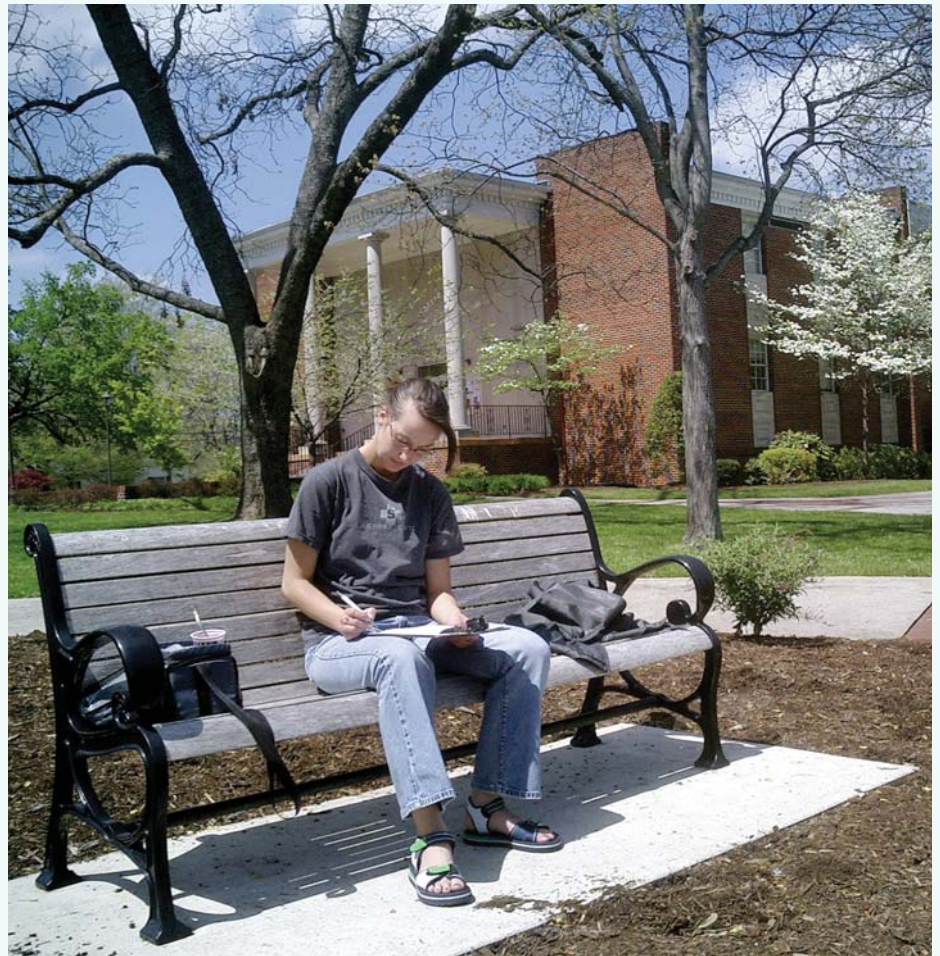
What to do if you don't receive an offer

Top tip...

- If you do not receive an offer and decide to go through Extra or Clearing, make sure you stay focused on the subject you want to study. You may feel attached to the university you wanted to go to, and be tempted to apply for a completely different course at the same university. However, it is important not to lose sight of your subject choice.

Important note...

- Many students lose confidence at this point, but it is important not to take it personally. If you don't receive an offer, it is not a rejection of you, it is just that you don't fully match the requirements that they have at this time. Do take advantage of whatever support is available to help you, and then make a plan for what to do next.



Don't give up

If you have made five choices on your UCAS application form, and have **received no offers** on any of them, or if you have **declined** all the offers you did receive, then you may apply for another course through **Extra** on the UCAS website. Extra allows you to apply for another course between the end of February and the beginning of July. Full details can be found here:

www.ucas.com/students/offers/extra

If you have **not received an offer**, or did not meet the criteria required for your confirmed choice then you can take part in **Clearing** between mid July and September. This allows you to apply for remaining places on university courses. Full details can be found here:

www.ucas.com/students/nextsteps/clearing

If you are not able to get a place at all this year, then **don't give up**. It may be that you need to go back to school or college for a year to retake some exams, or you may be able to take a **foundation or introductory course** which could put you in a better position to apply the following year. Or perhaps you need to rethink your course choices. Either way, remember that all is not lost. If university is still the right choice for you, then you can always apply again **next year**.

Even if you have previously received **careers guidance**, this would be a good time to seek more if it is available to you. Impartial careers guidance gives you an opportunity to talk through ideas in general before making any decisions. Its purpose is to help you to focus on your choices, find answers to questions, resolve issues and then make informed decisions.



Summary checklist

Remembering everything

Stage One – Research

Have you:

- Looked at the information, and viewed the video guides, on the UCAS website?
- Fully researched the courses you are interested in?
- Fully researched the universities you are interested in?

Stage Two – Preparing to apply

Have you:

- Received your school or college's UCAS 'Buzzword' and then registered on the UCAS website? Remember to record your login details somewhere you won't forget, such as on your mobile phone.
- Identified whether your predicted grades will be enough for the courses you want to apply for?
- Spoken with your school or college about the courses/universities you would like to apply to?
- Considered the financial implications of your choices, and found out what financial help and support might be available to you?
- Collated all the information you will need for your application?
- Located your exam certificates for the qualifications you are using as entry requirements, or ordered new copies?

Stage Three – Applying

Have you:

- Filled in each section of the form, saving as you go?
- Reviewed your personal statement several times to make sure it fully reflects you at your best?
- Proof checked every part of your application to ensure accuracy, and asked at least one other person to also check it?
- Verified that your reference has been done by your school or college?
- Completed and submitted your application early?

Stage Four – Progressing your application

Have you:

- Kept a regular check on the status of your application through Track on the UCAS website?
- Responded promptly to requests for additional information or invitations to interview?
- Responded promptly to offers received?
- Applied for further courses promptly through Extra or Clearing, if relevant?

Studying at university gives you the opportunity to take responsibility for your own learning. You will need to plan and study independently, making decisions for yourself and using your initiative. So start developing those skills now. Certainly take advantage of the help and support available to guide you through the application process, but don't expect someone else to do the work for you. It is your future, and it is your responsibility to thoroughly research your options, find out what help and support will be available to you, and ensure that your application is the best that it can be.

Glossary of terms

Jargon, abbreviations and terms relating to university study

Adjustment

A system where students whose exam results meet or exceed those required by their firmly accepted conditional offer, have up to five days to look for alternative courses without losing their confirmed place.

Apply

The name for the UCAS online application system.

BA

Bachelor of Arts degree.

BEng

Bachelor of Engineering degree.

BSc

Bachelor of Science degree.

Bursary

A non-repayable allocation of money awarded to students by universities. This could be course related, or means tested.

Buzzword

A word which has been chosen by your school or college when they register with UCAS. You will need this buzzword when you first set yourself up on UCAS so that you are linked to the correct school or college.

Campus

The buildings and grounds of a university.

Clearing

The system run at the end of the application cycle to enable students who do not have a place to apply for courses that have vacancies. It is the last opportunity a student has to gain a place that year.

Conditional Offer

An offer of a place made by a university which has certain conditions attached to it that the student has to meet in order to secure their place, such as the achievement of certain grades.

Deferral

An agreement between a university and a student for the student to delay starting their course until the following year.

Diploma of Higher Education or DipHE

This is a qualification offered by some universities, equivalent to two years study on a degree programme.

DSA

Disabled Students' Allowance. Money awarded to help students with disabilities meet some of their costs whilst studying.

Extra

The system which allows students who have made five choices on their UCAS application, but are not holding any offers, to apply for another course. This takes place before Clearing starts.

Faculty

A group of academic departments within a university, such as 'Faculty of Health', sometimes the faculties are referred to as 'Schools', for example 'School of Law'.

Glossary of terms continued

FE

Further education. FE usually refers to study that is taken after statutory schooling is finished, but below higher education level.

Finals

These are the final exams taken by students at the end of their Higher Education course.

Firm Offer

The offer of a place which the student has accepted as being their first choice.

Foundation Degree

A vocational degree that includes some work-based learning, and is completed in a shorter amount of time than a full degree. Students can usually go on to do an extra year or two at the end of the Foundation Degree to receive a full Honours Degree.

Foundation Year

Available in some subjects only, mainly science or art. For students who have not met the degree entry requirements, the foundation year enables them to do some preparatory study for the degree. Successful completion usually guarantees a place on the full degree course.

Freshers

This is the name given to students who are just starting their time at university.

Gap Year

A year away from study in between the end of school or college and the start of university.

Graduate

A person who has been awarded a degree from a higher education institution.

Grant, or Maintenance Grant

An allocation of money awarded to some students from lower income families to support their costs whilst studying. Grants do not have to be repaid.

Halls

The halls of residence are the blocks of accommodation on campus for students. Priority is usually given to first year students.

HE

Higher education. Study at degree level or higher. HE courses are usually run at universities, but increasingly further education colleges are running some HE courses.

HNC/HND

Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma.

Honours Degree

A qualification awarded by a higher education institution after the satisfactory completion of three years of full-time study on a degree course, or the part-time equivalent.

Insurance

The offer of a place which the student has accepted as being their second choice.

Glossary of terms continued

Joint Honours Degree

A degree in more than one subject.

Lecture

A teaching class led by a lecturer. It usually takes the format of the lecturer talking and presenting with the students taking notes and an opportunity to ask questions.

Loan

Student loans are taken to pay for university fees and to help with living costs. These do not need to start being repaid until the student is working and earns over a certain amount.

Masters Degree

A higher level degree which can be taken after satisfactory completion of a first degree. A Masters Degree is an example of a postgraduate qualification. Some Masters courses can be applied for through UCAS.

Nightline

Many universities run a service known as Nightline which is a confidential listening and help service for students.

NUS

National Union of Students – the organisation that represents students and looks after their interests.

Oxbridge

An informal term to describe the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Personal ID

A 10 digit number which is assigned by UCAS to students who register to use Apply. Applicants will be asked to provide this number whenever they contact UCAS.

PhD

Doctor of Philosophy. A qualification beyond Masters Degree level which is the culmination of years of research, study and writing which is assessed. The holder of a PhD can use the title of Doctor (Dr.)

PGCE

Postgraduate Certificate in Education. A teacher training course taken after successful completion of a degree.

Postgraduate Courses

Higher level courses, usually only taken after successful completion of a degree. Postgraduate study can lead to a Masters Degree or a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma.

QTS

Qualified Teacher Status.

Reading Week

A period during the university term when there are no taught sessions, and students are expected to work on their own study and research.

Russell Group

A group of 20 leading UK universities, set up as a collaborative group in 1994. Places at Russell Group universities are generally the most competitive.

Glossary of terms continued

Sandwich Course (also known as 'Year in Industry')

Any course that includes a year away from the institution, working or abroad as part of the course.

Scholarship

Financial help given by some organisations for study on specific courses, or for particular groups of students.

Semester

Some universities or colleges divide the study year into two halves, known as semesters, as opposed to the more traditional three terms.

Single Honours Degree

A degree in a single subject.

Seminar

Seminars are more interactive than lectures. They may be student led, or involve presentations from students, and usually involve discussions around course material.

Students Union

A student organisation present in most universities, and some colleges. The student union is there to represent students on local and national issues, as well as organising many of the social activities for students on campus.

Tariff Points

The points system attributed to entry qualifications for higher education courses.

Track

Track is accessed online through UCAS and is part of 'Apply'. It is where students track the progress of their application, receive information on offers made, and reply to offers.

Tuition Fees

These are the fees charged by universities for their courses. Students take out loans for their tuition fees and start to pay them back once they are working and earning over a certain amount.

Tutorial

A discussion session with your tutor about your work or issues with the course. These are run on a one-to-one, or small group basis.

UCAS

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Almost all students applying for full-time higher education courses in the UK now apply through UCAS.

Unconditional Offer

An offer of a place made by a university with no conditions attached to it.

Undergraduate

A student who is in the process of studying for a degree.

Vocational Course

A work-related programme of study designed to help you into a specific career.

Where to go for more information

Useful Website Resources

Directgov - Careers advice and information

<https://nextstep.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/Workandcareers/index.htm

Open Days – The university and college open day directory

www.opendays.com

Prospects – Search for careers to find out what is involved, and what the routes are for getting there

www.prospects.ac.uk

Push – An independent guide to universities and student life

www.push.co.uk

Student finance – Find out how much university is going to cost, what type of financial help and support you may be entitled to, and how to apply for it

www.ucas.com/students/studentfinance

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance

The Student Room – Online student community; access student guides and chat online with other students

www.thestudentroom.co.uk

UCAS – The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

www.ucas.ac.uk

UK Course Finder – Helps you find the most suitable university course for you through a questionnaire.

www.ukcoursefinder.com

Union View – Film clips of students discussing their university and showing the campuses and surrounding areas

www.unionview.com

Unistats – The official website for comparing courses and universities

www.unistats.com

What Uni? – Find out what students think about the universities they are studying at

www.whatuni.com

Guideline calendar of approximate da

Please check the UCAS website for exact dates which may change each year. For

September	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	Mid September UCAS applications open for courses starting next year.
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	

October	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	Mid October Application deadline for medicine, dentistry and veterinary courses, and for Oxford and Cambridge universities.
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	
31	

November	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	

December	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	
31	

April	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	

May	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	Early May Deadline for replying to offers, if universities made their decisions by the end of March.
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	
31	

June	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	

July	
1	
2	
3	
4	Early July The last o to apply t Extra.
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	Mid July Clearing o
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	End July Deadline to offers applicatio through E
28	
29	
30	
31	

Version 1 July 2011

Copies available for download from the Resources section at
www.kafec.org.uk and from **www.kentchoices4u.com**

For further information about this guide please contact Dr Felicity Dunworth at
felicity.dunworth@canterbury.ac.uk or **f.e.dunworth@kent.ac.uk**