



UCAS De-mystified

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Application Service) is the process in the UK for applying to university and college courses. The UCAS website provides an online application platform, which you need to register for to make applications to university courses.

The website also has lots of advice and information including a video to help you make application.

Applications

You can apply to only one course if you wish, but most school leavers make multiple applications for up to 5 courses. However,

- You can only apply to one course at either Oxford or Cambridge but not both.
- For Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary medicine courses you can only apply to four courses, but use a choice but for a different course.

In your application some information is provided by you and some is provided by your school. As a school leaver you need to link your application to your school and you do this by using the school 'Buzzword' which your school will give you (this changes every year).

You provide your personal details and these must match any names or details used on your exam entries and official documentation like your birth certificate or passport.

The cost

The cost for the 2022 cycle will be £22 for a single application and £26.50 for up to five applications.

Key date: May 2021

The UCAS Apply system opens and you can begin to register and search for courses for 2022 entry.

Key Date - Summer 2021

Research university courses

University courses fall broadly into two types:

- vocational courses which lead to a professional qualification or links to a career area
- academic subject courses many of which will be completely new to you and not taught in schools

Vocational courses deliver the required theoretical content and practical skills to enable work in the profession at the end of the course and the degree usually will be accredited by a governing body. There might be differences in the way the courses at different universities are taught but not in the content and competencies.

When you search for academic subject courses it is important to look at the courses at different universities in-depth, for example, English is not the same at every institution. The course could be literature or language. Some courses have more analysis, some offer creative writing, others will focus on language structure and linguistics (the science of language). Literature can be lots of different genres: world literature or American literature for example or English and American literature combined. You can

find studies to suit your very individual interests, so think about what you want to study, how much flexibility you want and then search for your 'ideal' course.

If you are considering a new subject then read around the subject and do a taster to make sure that you like it (see our experience and taster information sheet on the FutureSmart Careers Resources Hub). Tasters are especially important for those students signing up to longer courses like a 5/6-year engineering degrees. This year, due to the pandemic, many tasters have moved online.

Researching universities

At the time of writing, visiting universities is still not possible at the moment, but there are lots of virtual campus tours (see our information sheet). Universities will be keen to get potential applicants onto their campuses as soon as the restrictions are lifted.

Choosing where to study is more than just who offers the course. Reputation may be important and there are many different ranking systems which you could explore:

[The Times Higher Education World Rankings 2021](#)

[The Guardian Best Universities League Table 2021](#)

[The Complete University Guide League Table 2021](#)

About Entry requirements

It is essential to understand the different entry requirements that courses may have. These fall into three categories: Grades, Work Experience and Additional Tests.

Grades

There are several ways that universities make offers to students:

- some make alphabetical offers (A levels and BTEC) and points for the IB. They may stipulate grades/points in individual subjects.
- Some make numerical grade offers based on the UCAS tariff and there is a tariff calculator on the UCAS website.

Lots of qualifications are given tariff points but many are not, for example, there are no points for GCSEs or D of E.

Have a conversation with your teachers to get an idea of the grades that will be predicted in each of your subjects.

Apply to courses with different entry requirements to include one or two aspirational courses (above predicted grades), one or two that match your predicted grades and one or two with slightly lower entry requirements by one or two grades - so ABB goes to ABC or BBB or BBC).

Work Experience

Work experience can be helpful and, in some cases, it is essential. Some universities ask students to have had work experience to ensure that they are suited to practice in the career field.

The challenge during the pandemic is to find virtual work experience and to make sure that you get a realistic idea about what is involved in a particular career.

The medical courses (medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine) typically require evidence of work experience as an entry requirement, but are accepting virtual work experience placements as a

replacement for in-person placements during the pandemic. These courses are early entry (October 2022) and you may not be able to fit in much more work experience before your application goes in, so check the university websites where there is information about how to deal with this. We particularly like the information provided by Birmingham University about this.

Additional tests

Some courses require additional tests, so check and allow time to register for and complete them.

Interviews

Some courses/universities interview applicants; be prepared and make sure you know if that is likely to be the case with your courses or universities. Also find out why interviews are being used - some are designed to encourage you to attend the university, others to select applicants for offers.

Filling in your Application Form

To begin filling out the UCAS online application, you will need to enter your personal information and all your qualifications such as GCSEs with the exam board and syllabus codes, plus anything else that you have taken and have the results for. Your predicted grades for Upper Sixth exams will be input by your school.

You do not need to apply to 5 courses in one go, you can add extra courses by logging into Track later.

You do not have to apply to the same course at all universities. Some universities will let you submit an additional personal statement for a different course.

You can apply to more than one course at a university and it is worth checking to see what the individual university policy is about double entries. Some will shunt applications to a course that they want to fill, while others will welcome a double application and give equal consideration to it.

Your Personal Statement

If you have decided on your course then consider starting your personal statement. This is the 4000 character document which the universities receive to help them decide whether to make you an offer (some universities use this more than others) but to make a strong application across several institutions you should assume that it will be important to some of your choices if not all.

School Character Reference

In addition to your personal statement, your school will add a 4000-character reference to your UCAS application. This can be a really useful way of communicating information that you would like the universities to know about you. This could be any amazing achievements or perhaps extenuating circumstances. Make sure you have a conversation with your school about what is going into your reference.

Deferring a place

You will need to specify if you are intending to start in 2022 – straight from school or whether you are applying for deferred entry in 2023 – after a gap year. You can also ask to defer your place later in the process if you change your mind but you will need to get universities' permission to do this.

Before your application goes to UCAS it will be checked by your school and they will let you know that it is ok and that you can press send. At this point you will need to make your payment.

Key Date: Early September 2021

Check what your predicted grades will be and do your final course and university selection.

In addition to your personal information you need to select the course codes and institution codes for the courses you wish to apply for.

You need to upload your personal statement which you will have edited with the help of your teachers and tutor and other staff involved in the UCAS process at school.

Deadlines for applications

1 October - Deadline application for music courses at Conservatoires.

15 October - Early applications deadline, for Oxbridge (see our information sheet making a successful Oxbridge application), medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine (school deadlines will be earlier).

15 January - Deadline for most UK universities and Conservatoire courses.

If you submit your application by this date you should receive the same consideration as everyone else who has applied.

For those who have held back one or two slots on their UCAS application, you may wish to add additional choices. You can hold back to see which courses are still recruiting when Extra opens but some courses will close now because they have enough applicants.

Receiving Offers

Universities can make offers very quickly and so the earlier your application goes in the faster you may get offers!

Two systems generally operate

- 1) offers are made when applications are received
- 2) 'gathered field' offers are made to all applicants at the same time but only when all applications have been gathered, usually after the January deadline date.

These are not university-wide policies but department decisions, so don't worry if your friends are getting offers for different courses but you have not received anything yet.

Key Date: 15 February

UCAS Extra Opens

Extra is designed to help students who have been rejected by all their courses. It allows students to make another application. Additional applications are done one at a time. You are normally limited to 5 applications in a cycle.

Universities that are still recruiting applicants to their courses will declare that they have vacancies.

Some students use Extra to make an application to a different course because they have changed their mind. If you want to do this, you can't hold any offers or have any outstanding decisions to make or you will need to reject your offers/applications to do so.

This means that you will only hold one offer and will not have an insurance option. It may be worth contacting a university that has made you an offer to see if they would transfer you to a different course.

You do not need to wait for Extra to open to do this - so if you change your mind speak to your universities to see what they can do. If you have not made an application already, then you can make a late application, so a full application to 5 courses, you can check and see if the courses are still recruiting through extra and you can contact universities and courses to see if they will take a late application before you submit.

Key Date: End of March

This is the deadline for universities to give you their decision for applications submitted by **15 January**. Most people will hear by the 31 March but don't worry if you haven't. The early applicants - the medics, dentists and vets - are often the last to hear (Oxbridge offers are made earlier).

If you have not heard from all your courses your deadline to make your choices will be extended.

Key Date: Beginning of May

This is deadline for you to make your decision about which offers you will accept, provided you have received all your offers/rejections. You also have the option to make your decisions earlier if you prefer.

You can decide to confirm a conditional firm choice (CF) and an insurance (CI).

If you have an unconditional offer, it will show as unconditional firm (UF) and an unconditional insurance will show as (UI).

Your insurance course should have a lower entry requirement than your firm first choice.

If your first choice is the lowest offer you have then you do not need to have an insurance, as if you have failed to make the grades of your lowest offer you will have failed to meet the grades of the higher offers. If you have an unconditional firm you will not have an insurance as you have already met the terms of your offer.

If you change your mind after you have submitted your choices (in the first two weeks) contact UCAS as they will be able to help you change your selections.

If you do not meet the end of May deadline, your offers will disappear! They will no longer be on your UCAS Track and you will need to go through a whole level of pain to get them reinstated – and they should be, but it is much easier to meet the deadline.

Key Date: Beginning of June

Final date for universities to give decision through the normal application process.

Key Date - Mid June

Deadline for applicant decisions through the normal applications process.

Key Date - End of June

All new UCAS applications will go straight to Clearing.

Key Date - Beginning of July

Extra Closes

You can still make an application if you have not used all your choices or if you want to make a late application but nothing more through extra.

Key Date - Beginning of July

Clearing opens

Clearing is a process where you can look for a course vacancy if you have failed to meet the terms of your offers and both your firm and insurance choice of universities are not going to accept you.

You cannot enter Clearing until you have your results. For IB students whose results come out at the beginning of July it is open, but for A level students, you can enter Clearing when your results have come out.

The lowest grades will be available through Clearing and universities will be keen to take students from oversubscribed courses that have failed to meet their offer onto other courses that may still have vacancies.

Many students choose to change their course or university through Clearing and we see a wide range of universities and courses recruiting through Clearing every year.

Anyone can use Clearing regardless of whether they have got their place or not and many do. However, there can be some issues for these students with getting accommodation and some find making big changes to their plans can be very challenging - so think about what works best for you.

Results and accepting places

Every year a significant number of students are accepted by their university even if they have not achieved the offer. However, universities are not under any obligation to do this.

Universities receive your results about 5 days before you and they will have been looking at their numbers and quotas. They will want to run full courses, so there will be a good deal of pressure on them to adopt more 'flexible' grade policies.

You will know if your place has been confirmed (CF) by logging into Track and if it has been it will show as UF (unconditional firm). You may find you have been rejected from your CF and your insurance may show as UF or you may have been rejected from both of your options in which case you will be in Clearing.

If you are still showing CF or CI that means that your university has not decided whether they will be taking you, you are still under consideration. If this happens you need to speak to your university to find out what is happening. You can decline your place once it becomes unconditional and put yourself into Clearing but make sure you get some advice before doing this.

If you *have* met the terms of your offer, your university will have to take you, even if they are over-subscribed. They may try and persuade you to take a gap year and come the following year or to transfer to a different course, but you do not have to do either of these. Meeting the terms of your offer is the only way that you can guarantee your place!

Key Date – Mid August (tbc)

Adjustment opens

For students who have exceeded the terms of their offer by achieving higher grades than expected, Adjustment allows students to negotiate a place on a higher entry requirement course. You do not have to let your UF place go while you do this.

Our advice

UCAS exists to help you make your applications easily and it is designed to be as flexible and customer-focused as possible. There is a lot of information and guidance on their website, including videos and FAQs. Everyone understands that you are making very big decisions and that these may change as you gain more knowledge and experience. Nobody wants to see you go to the wrong university or do the wrong course and everyone is going to do the best they can to help you at every stage.

If you get it wrong – please tell someone and get some help to change your choices. There is nothing good about starting a course and dropping out because you changed your mind but didn't think you could do anything about it. If you start a course and hate it, speak to someone, get some help and do it quickly.

Don't feel pressured to make decisions that do not suit you, lots of people do not go university straight from school or ever and there are lots of very good work-based training options including some very interesting degree apprenticeships that may be a better fit for you.

University has lots to offer lots of people and for many, it offers a fantastic experience, making friends for life, gaining great life experiences as well as the chance to grow and discover who you are and study the things that you are passionate about for 3, 4, 5, 6 years maybe longer. So, do your research, choose well and make it the best years you possibly can.

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