

General guide to UCAS 2022

Introduction

Anyone considering applying to a UK university will ordinarily be making an application through UCAS (Universities and Colleges admissions service). In order to make a successful application through UCAS there are a variety of considerations and things to do in order to be best prepared for the process. This year, in a break from previous years, students will apply through the 'UCAS Hub' (<https://accounts.ucas.com/account/login?returnUrl=https%3A//www.ucas.com/dashboard>). The UCAS hub contains lots of really helpful information and has a variety of useful resources but it is also where students will eventually complete their UCAS application – it is completely free so we recommend that students interested in applying for apprenticeships also sign up. It is important to note at this point that signing up for the UCAS Hub in no way commits you to make an application, it is just the means through which you eventually do. The following guide is a useful starting point and will give you links to follow in order to develop your understanding but it will always be beneficial to use the UCAS website itself if there is anything that you are unsure of: <https://www.ucas.com/>

Planning

One of the most important things to consider when you begin planning your application to university are the deadlines you need to meet. For some elements of the process there are strict deadlines that cannot be moved but in order to meet those deadlines and have a high-quality application, you also need to be aware of parts of the process without strict deadlines which are key and need to be brought into your mindset. This guide, along with the package of supporting documents that we have created for UCAS 2022, will both highlight key dates but will also suggest when you should be engaging with different parts of the process, i.e. course choices, university visits (likely to remain virtual in many cases this year), personal statement drafting, etc.

Your UCAS journey for courses starting in 2022 will typically begin this spring/early summer. Although this is quite typical, for some courses and for some individuals this journey can begin sooner and it is certainly always good to give yourself time to explore ideas and gather information from others.

Suggested timeline

The timeline offered below is a very general suggestion and there are reasons why some elements won't be practical or applicable, but it could be useful to those that have yet to start thinking about their application to university.

May/June – (this is primarily a research stage where you gather information)

Begin thinking about the course that you want to study at university and shortlisting where you might want to go to study it. It is useful at this point to get an up to date indication from your teachers of what your predicted grades currently are, as this will help to inform your shortlisting – you neither want to be overly optimistic or pessimistic. Once you have this information you can begin using tools such as the UCAS course search facility: <https://digital.ucas.com/search>. Once you have a working shortlist you will then want to monitor to see when open days are (these are very likely to be virtual or blended this year, so should make accessing multiple events easier), either for the universities as a whole or, where applicable, your specific subject area – you can find information about dates and what's on offer by using these following websites: <https://www.opendays.com/>; <https://www.unitasterdays.com/>. These open day dates typically run from spring/early summer and universities will often have two or more, but please be aware that if you want to get your application sent off early, you want to try to express your interest in attending the earlier ones, where possible. For those applying to early deadline courses such as medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry and any course at Oxford or Cambridge, this will be particularly important (more information regarding these types of application can be found in the early deadline guidance that forms part of our 2022 guidance).

Alongside knowing your predicted grades, this is where you might want to engage in some research to help you be sure that the course/s that you're considering will get you where you want to go. For this it is really useful to use the Prospects website. You can use this excellent resource in a variety of ways but perhaps the two most useful are either to: 1) start with the degree that you are considering and then see the kinds of options people with that degree typically pursue/are qualified for, and/or, 2) if you know what you want to be, you can search for a given career and see what the necessary qualifications are. To put this into practice see the examples below:

Example scenario 1: You know you want to do a psychology degree (<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree/psychology>) but are unsure what kinds of options will be available to you after.

Example scenario 2: You know you want to be an architect (<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/architect>) but are unsure about the options available to qualify as one. When you search for specific roles using Prospects you can go to the qualifications sections to see what routes are available and how you go about training. As you will see for the role of architect you can actually reach this outcome both through a traditional degree and a degree apprenticeship. This will be true of various careers goals but it is important to note that there is nothing to stop you applying to both

routes and if you are undecided, or where there are relatively few degree apprenticeships available, this would generally be what we would recommend to keep your options open.

Once you have begun this research stage you will inevitably begin to look at the specific entry requirements for courses and you might find that there are additional requirements as part of the admissions process. For example, those applying to Oxford and Cambridge will probably have to complete a pre-admissions test, which they will need to prepare for; those applying for architecture will need to submit a portfolio that will need to be prepared; and those applying to a medicine degree will need to complete either a UCAT or BMAT test and have completed some relevant work experience. There might also be some GCSE requirements in addition to the level 3 requirements. There are a variety of potential elements to the admissions process for specific universities and courses, so please ensure that you are aware of what is relevant to you because you might need time to prepare. Please feel free to email either your tutor or Careers if you encounter anything that you are unsure about but the advice in the first instance is to interrogate university websites and, in particular, admissions requirements very carefully.

You can also begin drafting your personal statement during May and June. This is perhaps the part of your UCAS application that requires the most effort and it can be useful to start the drafting process early. The most beneficial aspect of starting this process early is that it allows you to see weak areas and then use the summer to improve them. For more information on what the personal statement is and how you can begin drafting it, take a look at the UCAS website:

<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/writing-personal-statement/how-write-personal-statement>

July/August – This is when you need to be attending open days, continuing to perfect your personal statement (developing areas that are weak, for example if you need to get more work experience, read more around the subject, develop your extra/supra-curricular activities, prepare for pre-admissions tests, etc.), and engage more with your course/career choice so that when you return to college in September we are ready to move the application along (please remember that as a consequence of Covid there are now many more online resources and sources of virtual work experience that you can engage with). Don't panic at this point if you haven't made your mind up, it is unwise and unhealthy to force a decision that you are not ready to make, there are various key members of staff and teams within the college that will work closely to support you.

September – If you haven't already done so this is when we would get you to begin your UCAS application in the UCAS Hub. By following our guidance (documents for both campuses are included in this information pack) you will be linking your application to the college – it is here that you can enter the personal statement that you have been working on over the summer when you're ready. With the help of your progress coach and Careers you will complete the UCAS form. This

process is quite straightforward and as long as you have diligently done the above steps we are really just populating a form with your details, your course and uni choices and your personal statement – any other requirements should have been established during your research stage and all being well you should be prepared/preparing for those. Towards the end of this month those applying to an early deadline course will be complete and their application will be ready to send to UCAS – the internal deadline for these courses is contained in our ‘Apply’ instruction sheets.

October/early November – Those applying to standard deadline courses (the vast majority of course choices have the standard deadline) will be finishing their applications throughout this period. During this time there will also be students taking pre-admissions tests, which will be necessary for their application to be considered complete. For example, courses at Oxford and Cambridge with a pre-admissions test typically take place in late October and are sat at the college.

October onwards – some additional requirements such as interviews, portfolio submissions and auditions (for those applying for some creative courses, such as acting) will take place on a rolling basis all the way through into the new year. It is important that once your application has been submitted to UCAS by the college (you will get an email when this has happened) you closely monitor correspondence sent to you from UCAS and individual universities, so that you are aware of any requests they have or invitations to further assessment, where necessary.

Key considerations and resources

Which course do you want to study?

There are several websites useful in answering this question, some of which we have included below. Once you have signed up to the UCAS Hub, you will also find that there are some excellent resources for exploring course and university choices:

- <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/>
- <https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>
- <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/how-choose-right-undergraduate-course-you>
- <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/what-to-study/choosing-a-course>

Where do you want to study? You have up to 5 choices in UCAS so it’s useful to have a shortlist initially of at least that many universities for your chosen subject. This way you can begin to think about the logistics of attending as many open days/taster days as possible.

- <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/choosing-course/how-choose-between-undergraduate-courses-and-unis>

- <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/where-to-study/choosing-a-university>

Making sure you know the requirements. The UCAS course search tool is a good starting point here but you should always be supplementing this by also going on to the individual university websites to ensure that you are getting the most up to date information. If there is any doubt you should be following this up with a phone call to the appropriate admissions team.

- <https://digital.ucas.com/search>
- <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/courses>
- **Always go directly to university websites before you consider this bit of research complete**

Getting your personal statement drafted. Although you will be getting support from your tutor here, it is useful for you to have bit of a tool kit so as you can make independent progress. Below are some links to useful resources that could help you make a start.

- <https://www.which.co.uk/money/university-and-student-finance/getting-into-uni/how-to-write-a-personal-statement-a3bfp7h4yv7s>
- <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/applying-to-uni/tips-for-writing-your-personal-statement>

If you would like to get some feedback on your personal statement draft directly from a university, please feel free to email our contact at the University of Portsmouth:

University of Portsmouth

<https://www.port.ac.uk/collaborate/schools-and-colleges/post-16-events/personal-statement-hub-registration>

Although websites such as Studential can be very useful for looking at examples of personal statements, please use them carefully and only ever for inspiration and familiarisation. As with university coursework submissions, UCAS use advanced plagiarism software to detect where anyone might have copied all or parts of other personal statements. If this is discovered it has the potential to jeopardise your entire application, so please ensure that you do not accidentally copy anything from examples that you look at when you are doing your research.

That being said, looking at example personal statements can be a great way to familiarise yourself with the expectations and formats, just be very careful when doing so that you do not plagiarise. In addition to this consideration, when looking to other personal statement examples for inspiration, please remember that your source is key in terms of knowing whether you are actually looking at a high quality personal statement or not. It is also worth remembering that personal statement writing is not a science but an art and although there are some key elements that you need to cover, you

are afforded a good deal of poetic licence within reasonably broad parameters. Three lenses that might be useful when reviewing your personal statement are:

- 1) Motivation – what has the candidate told the reader about their motivation to study the course and how have they demonstrated it?
- 2) Exploration – what has the candidate told the reader about what they have done to explore their subject and how can they be sure that it is a carefully considered decision that is backed by research and understanding?
- 3) Suitability – what has the candidate done to prove that they are suitable to study the course? Do they have the skills and attributes to succeed on the given undergraduate course?

How you go about demonstrating these three things and the degree to which they can cross over is completely individual and is very much where the art comes in. Your aim with the personal statement is to show the admissions team that you are the right person to offer a place to – take this opportunity to demonstrate why that's the case. It is also important to keep in mind that the personal statement is not an exercise in listing your experience but rather reflecting on them, so it is important to find a balance between your use of examples and the extent to which you reflect on them.