

The
UCAS Guide
to getting into
University
and College

Everything you need to know about
the entire research and application process

UCAS

First Edition

Introduction

With applications to university and college becoming increasingly competitive, UCAS has produced this guide to help you in your research and planning so that you make informed decisions and the right choices about what, and where, to study.

Whether you're applying for full-time study, part-time study or distance learning, this comprehensive guide aims to direct you through the UCAS application process and tackle any questions that you may have about applying to higher education.

It will explain what UCAS' role is in your higher education journey and explain the application process in six easy steps. The steps will cover 'choosing courses', 'applying', 'offers', 'results', 'next steps' and finally 'starting university or college'.

Within these sections you will find comprehensive information on finance, open days, interviews, writing your personal statement, getting into Oxbridge, taking a gap year and much more.

Whatever your circumstances, whether you are applying through your school or applying independently; whether you are applying from the EU or a non-EU country; or whether you are a student with a disability, everything is covered in this guide.

Key to symbols

You'll find these symbols throughout this book to make it easy to locate the information relevant to you.



Case studies. The experience of others.



Did you know? A great idea.



Frequently asked questions and the answers.



International students. Worldly advice.



Mature students. Older and wiser!



Myth buster. Blow those myths from your mind.



Students' tips. Advice from those who've gone before you.



Students with disabilities. Unlock your potential!



Top tip. Pinpointing key tips from UCAS.

Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	3
Key to symbols	5
Where to start	
What is higher education?	13
UCAS - Our role in your journey	23
Mature students	27
Students with disabilities	31
Non-UK students	39
Money: how to get hold of it!	43
Chapter summary	54
Step 1 Choosing courses	
Do your research	57
Look at league tables	83
Money: scholarships	95
Summer schools and taster courses	97
Admissions tests	101
Register for a UCAS Card	115
Chapter checklist	118

Step 2 Applying

When to apply	121
How to apply	125
How to complete your UCAS application	129
Personal statement	145
Applying for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science or veterinary medicine	167
Applying for Oxbridge	173
Chapter checklist	179

Step 3 Offers

After you apply	183
Track	187
Money: apply for student finance	193
Making changes	197
Interviews, portfolios and auditions	203
Unis' decisions	219
Replying to your offers	229
If you've no offers, Extra could be for you	237
Chapter checklist	242

Step 4 Results

Preparing for exam results	245
Exam results	249
What happens after the unis have your exam results	255
Chapter checklist	264

Step 5 Next steps

What next?	267
Studying in another country	277
Taking a gap year	281
More options	285
Chapter checklist	288

Step 6 Starting university and college

Preparing to study and getting support	291
Making friends	297
Starting university – leaving home	301
Accommodation	303
If you have a disability	311
If things go wrong and you want to make a complaint	313
Money: making it go further	315
Domestic life	321
Practical matters	325
Employment	331
Parents, grandparents, guardians, and other family members	333
Chapter checklist	335

Resources

UCAS Tariff	339
Jargon buster	355
Useful contacts	359
Map of major UK cities and airports	367

Acknowledgements	368
-------------------------------	-----

But the best way to decide if a university is right for you is to visit it. Arrange to go to an open day, or ask to arrange a tour.

How do I know if I'm eligible for a course?

Universities will list the entry requirements for their courses on their websites and on UCAS Course Search. Often they are listed in terms of UCAS Tariff points. If you are not sure if you have enough points, or your qualification is not included in the Tariff system, contact the university directly and ask them if you would meet their requirements.

Can I defer my place for a year?

You should check with the university or college you are interested in applying to in order to confirm they are happy to consider an application for deferred entry. You then need to state that you wish to defer on your application in the 'Choices' section by selecting the appropriate start date when adding the choice.

Choose a qualification that suits you

Most people think that higher education means studying for a degree, but there are many more qualifications that you can take at university or college. See the types of available qualifications on page 14.



Remember, you may get a better degree – which employers will like – if you study something you enjoy.

Consider combination courses if you would like to study more than one subject

If you are interested in more than one subject, you can choose to study a combination of subjects, eg English literature and psychology. Use Course Search at www.ucas.com to find out which combinations are available.

You can often decide for yourself how much time you would like to spend on each subject. See the section 'Single and combined courses' on page 18 for more information.

Did you know?

You can study waste management and dance...

It's amazing what combinations you can do. Over 1000 different subjects are available, in well over 43,000 different courses. So before jumping in with a favourite subject you're studying now, see what else is available. For example, if you're studying biology, have you thought about a course in zoology, marine biology or forensic science? If you prefer English, what about journalism, creative writing or primary school teaching?



International students

If you plan to work back in your home country, be sure to check with the professional body in your own country that the content of the course for professional qualifications is recognised.



Vocational or non-vocational course?

A vocational course is one which is job-specific while a non-vocational course is one which is not related to a specific job. A non-vocational course in something you have a passion about may make you more ready for a career than a job-specific course that you don't like much but chose for job-security reasons.

Consider taking a sandwich course, which includes a year of working in industry and gives you valuable experience in a profession. You can easily search for sandwich courses on Course Search at www.ucas.com by selecting 'sandwich' as your attendance type.

Think about how long it might take to achieve specific career goals and do this before you apply.

Studying abroad – Erasmus

Erasmus is the European exchange programme for higher education students. You get to study or do a work placement for a few months (anything from three to 12 months) in other European countries as part of your degree course. Students from all subjects can take part – it's not just for language students, although studying in another country will involve foreign languages in some way.



Student tip:

'Don't follow what your mates are doing or what uni they're going to – IT'S YOUR FUTURE!'

What use are they?

The conventions provide an opportunity to meet face-to-face with universities and colleges and obtain information regarding the course you are interested in and what the institution has to offer you with regard to facilities, support, clubs, etc. You will also be able to ask any questions you might have regarding the course or the institution.

How can I apply to go?

Tickets are not necessary for conventions, however invitations to book are usually sent out to schools and colleges prior to when booking commences. You are welcome to visit the convention on the day as an individual without prior booking.

You do need to book to attend an exhibition and you can do this online from the UCAS website.

Do I have to pay to come to an event?

No, all events are free of charge.

Choosing a university or college

There are lots of reasons why you might want to choose a particular university or college. The reasons will be personal to you and what is right for your friends might not be right for you. Here are some of the questions you might want to think about.

- **Near or far?** You might need to look for a local course so that you can stay with your family or you might be happy to move to wherever you need to go to do the right course.
- **Town or country?** Would you like to live in the centre of a big city to be close to all the facilities it has to offer or do you prefer a rural location?
- **Small or large?** Do you like the idea of studying on a really large university where there are large lecture theatres and something for everybody or would you prefer a small site where you can get to know everyone?



Student tip:

'Research the universities that are expert in your field and pick from there. All universities have the nightlife, the organisations and societies but not all universities specialise in your subject.'

**Student tip:**

'Choosing your uni. Well, it's not the easiest thing. All I can say is take what is important to you into consideration. I thought of:

- *Location – how far do I want to be away from home, friends and family?*
- *Cost – how far is it to travel? Is it an expensive area?*
- *Social 'n' nightlife – where do you think you can most enjoy and get the most out of?*
- *Relationships – is it going to be easy or tough? Well, just depends who you are.'*

- **Campus or non-campus?** Are you bothered whether you're on a campus where everything you need is located on one site or do you like the idea of moving around between sites?
- **What is the quality of study facilities, books and learning resources like?** Very important if you're going to be spending a lot of time there.
- **Hall of residence or rented accommodation?** Does it have guaranteed institution-managed accommodation for first year students? What's the cost of staying in hall? How easy is it to find a student house to live in?
- **Is there a range of activities, clubs and societies?** Many universities boast a vast array of clubs and societies from rowing and tennis to debating and religious clubs but some will be more active than others so check with the Students' Union and ask students when you visit on an open day.
- **Nightlife and social life?** Can you be assured of getting the social life you're after? Does it have an active Students' Union? What events does the Students' Union arrange? Are there clubs and pubs nearby that you want to go to?
- **Male to female ratio.** Are you interested in whether there are more females on campus than males, or vice versa?
- **What sports facilities are there?** Many universities have gyms, playing fields and swimming pools on site which are important if you like an active life.
- **What's the university's reputation?** The reputation of a university or college can be very subjective and it's important to choose a university that suits you rather than trying to fit into one that might not work for you. However, if you're thinking about your CV and the kudos a certain university will bring, then perhaps reputation is important for you. Maybe certain courses at specific universities are better regarded by an area of business or industry than others.
- **Does it have expert teaching staff?** What is the student to staff ratio? Are the academic staff experts in their field? How was the subject you were interested in rated in the latest Research Assessment Exercise (soon to be the Research Excellence Framework)? What teaching methods are used?

Personal statement

This is your opportunity to tell the unis why they should choose you. In your personal statement you'll need to demonstrate why you're suitable for the course, and show your enthusiasm and commitment. Above all, you'll need to ensure that you stand out from the crowd. Watch our UCAStv video guide at www.ucas.tv for help on how to start and what to include in your personal statement.

Look at our timeline overleaf to see when you need to start researching and writing your personal statement.

Structure and format

Think about the structure of your statement – it needs to look and sound good. A bad statement can say a lot, so make sure you get the grammar, spelling and punctuation right.

A representative from Ulster Business School told us:

'The presentation of the personal statement is of critical importance to demonstrate use of English language and grammar at a standard suitable for entry to higher education.'

How to provide your personal statement

You can enter up to 4,000 characters (this includes spaces) or 47 lines of text (this includes blank lines), whichever comes first. You don't have to use all the space provided. **We strongly recommend that you prepare your personal statement offline using a word-processing package and copy and paste it into the Apply system.**

Please note that you cannot use *italics*, **bold**, underlining or foreign characters (such as á, ë, ö) in your personal statement – the system will automatically remove these when saved. This will not disadvantage your application.

If you are an international student, we know that you may want to give correct titles of some things in your own language but universities and colleges are aware that accent marks and certain foreign characters are not accepted in Apply.

Note: From the 2012 entry application cycle you will be able to enter some accent marks and foreign characters into your personal statement, if you wish to do so. Further details of this will be available nearer the time.

Student tip

'The character limit is tough but try to cram in as much as you can because it is the only image that the universities will have of you – first impressions count!... It may be the first time you are encouraged to "brag" about yourself. Just keep it professional. And absolutely no spelling errors. You want to seem well rounded and also focused on your subject.'

A tip that I have... is to type out your personal statement in a word document first, then get it read by anybody who is willing to read it!



Applying for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science or veterinary medicine

Early deadline: If you're applying for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science or veterinary medicine you'll need to submit your application to UCAS by the early deadline of 15 October.

Admissions tests: For most medicine, dentistry, veterinary science or veterinary medicine courses you'll need to sit an admissions test for the course(s) you are applying for. You can check this on the Entry Profiles for your chosen courses on Course Search at www.ucas.com. You can read more about admissions tests on pages 101 to 114 in the Choosing courses section.

Interviews: You'll normally be interviewed by the university before they decide whether to offer you a place or not. If they want to invite you for an interview, this will usually be displayed in UCAS Track. You can accept the invitation in Track, or if you are unable to attend, you can request that the university offers you a different date.

Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry

'Peninsula Medical School is committed to widening access to medicine and therefore does not insist on work experience in a health care setting, as it favours those applicants who have contacts in the health care profession. However, we do recommend that applicants undertake any work experience that may help them improve some of the personal qualities that we assess at interview, eg communication skills, team work and flexibility.'

University of Bristol

'Whatever is possible for the applicant – for example, volunteering or work in a caring environment, such as an old people's home. We are not prescriptive because we know opportunities vary enormously.'

University of Oxford

'For medicine, some work experience in hospitals is theoretically desirable, but we do appreciate that it can be very difficult to arrange and we therefore have no requirement for it. Some candidates are exposed to more opportunities in this area than others. Any form of voluntary work would be beneficial in the context of applying for medicine (such as helping out in a hospital, at an old people's home, St John's ambulance, or work with a charity or overseas agency).'

Veterinary medicine

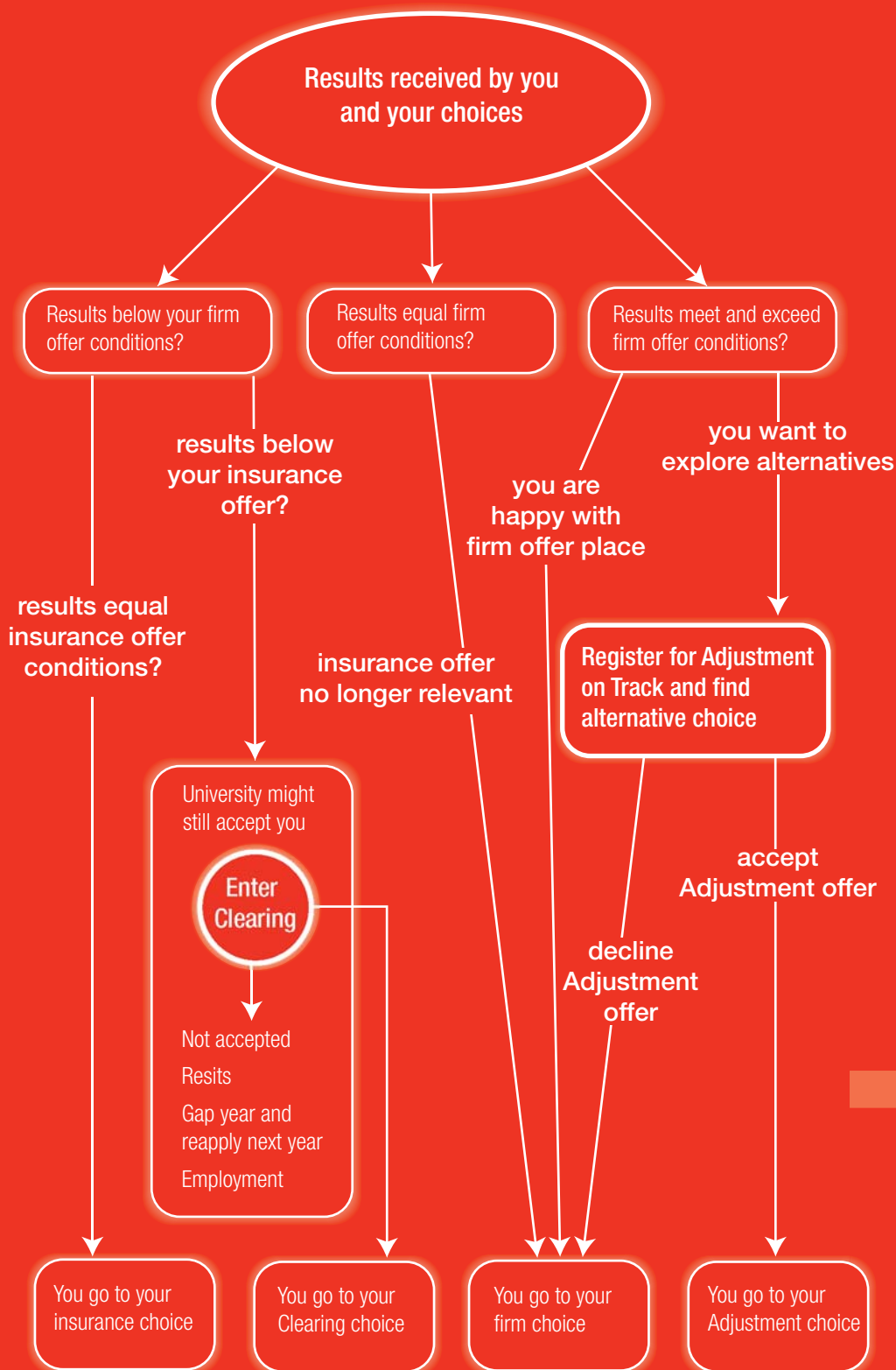
The Head of Admissions at The Royal Veterinary College offered this advice about work experience requirements for their veterinary medicine courses:

'For our veterinary medicine courses our current minimum work experience requirements are one week in veterinary practice and one week in different animal environment/s. This is going to be increased from September 2012 onwards to two weeks in vet practice and two weeks in different animal environment/s.'

'Our minimum requirements are quite low; we understand that it can be difficult for some applicants to gain a lot of relevant work experience and do not want to discourage applicants from different backgrounds from applying.'

Step 5

Next steps



Step 5