



**Richard Hale School**

# **Post-18 Pathways**



**The University  
Application Process 2026**



# Post-18 Pathways

## The University Application Process

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# Post-18 Pathways

## The University Application Process

### 1. Introduction

With little more than one year left at Richard Hale, what awaits you are a number of key decisions that will determine your immediate and mid-term futures. By now you may have decided that you want to continue through to Higher Education, perhaps to study for a degree or similar higher level qualification. The information in this booklet, along with the 'Post-18 Pathways' information evening should help inform your decision-making process.

The aim of this booklet is to support you as you make your application to university. It contains information on how to choose the right course and institution, the UCAS process itself, how to write the all-important Personal Statement and to complete the online application form. It also provides information on application to specialist courses, student finance and gap year guidance, as well as useful website links.

Although there are sections that might not be relevant to you, this booklet will certainly be a useful guide to help inform your decision making when choosing the courses and institutions you will apply to.

I hope that you find it useful.

Dr SJ Coote  
Head of Year 12

## 2. Why study at university?

### 2.1 The pros and cons

Degree	Job
Essential for many professions	Experience of life valuable
More employable generally	Lack of degree may become irrelevant in later life
Quicker promotion	Start work sooner
More money later	More money now
Considerable debt	Your pension pot accrued over more years
University life is fun	

University study allows students to further any particular academic interests, whilst enjoying the experience of living in a cosmopolitan student community and the chance to develop new friendships which present exciting opportunities. Degree-level study will also allow you to develop new skills and personal qualities such as self-reliance, adaptability and the ability to communicate effectively, all of which are valued by employers. Perhaps most important of all, higher education is often a way of obtaining a better job. Some professions have been 'graduate only' for many years but as more graduates enter the job market, a higher education qualification is increasingly becoming the norm.

For people who have no idea what they want to do for a career, perhaps the greatest benefit of applying for a degree course is that it delays the decision for a few years. There is nothing wrong with that - provided students enter into the course wholeheartedly, not just because they can't think of anything better to do. It should also be stated that having a university place to aim for is a good motivator during the lengthy revision period in the Upper Sixth... it can act as a light at the end of the tunnel!

### 2.2 The university experience

University education offers enhanced career prospects for able students; in addition, it provides opportunities to meet other students from a wide variety of backgrounds, the chance to stand up for your ideals and to manage your own affairs. Nevertheless, do not assume that you must inevitably go there. Aside from increasing financial pressures or failure to study effectively, many students drop out because of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. If you are not content in your surroundings, you will not do well. University is about far more than your course of study - it is about your learning being developed through the people you meet and the things you do and you should go to a place which will enable you to develop fully. Your

chosen course must interest you deeply if you are to gain the maximum from your university experience. Your needs, abilities and ambitions must all be carefully taken into account when taking a decision to pursue higher education.

### **2.3 Is one university better than another?**

University degree course content (and associated offers) vary widely from place to place and from subject to subject. Traditional universities tend to command higher grades and of these, the so called 'Russell Group' universities tend to have the most demanding of entrance requirements (tariffs). In principle, all degrees represent the same level of academic attainment and give the same exemptions from professional examinations, although certain degrees at some universities seem to be more favoured by employers than others. League tables are commonly compiled to rate universities by student performance, level of teaching, research activities and overall student experience. It is worth checking these out when considering which institutions to apply for. However, they only tell part of the story and should only play one part of your decision-making process.

### **2.4 Useful comparison websites**

- [Undergraduate Degree Course Search | Complete University Guide](#)
- [Search the Opendays.com calendar of university and college open days - search for an open day](#)
- [www.russellgroup.ac.uk/home/](http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/home/)
- [www.guardian.co.uk/education/universityguide](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/universityguide)
- [University Rankings and League Tables 2026](#)
- [The Uni Guide](#)
- [Whatuni](#)
- <https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/university/unimatch>

## 2.5 Decisions, decisions

Do not be overwhelmed by the size of the task. There may be over 105,000 courses spread across more than 700 universities and colleges but the vast majority of them won't interest or suit you. What you must do is to think carefully about what you want as the biggest cause of drop-out at degree level is simply the wrong choice of course.

There are 4 key decisions that you need to make: -

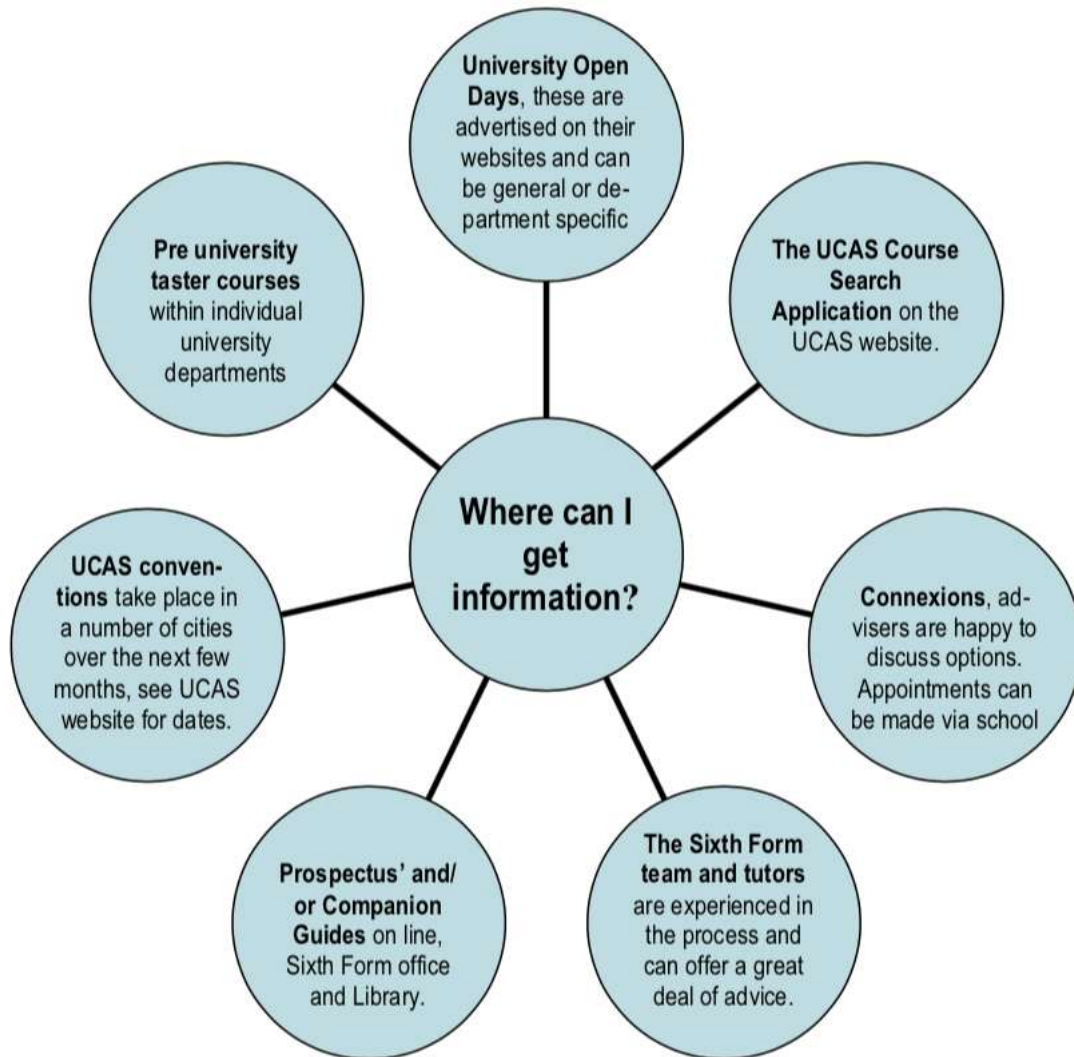
1. What subject do you want to study?
2. What kind of course do you want to embark upon?
3. What type of institution do you want to study at?
4. At which university / location would you like to study?

To make an informed choice, you need to take sufficient time to answer a number of key questions. Ask yourself ...

- Why do you want to study at university?
- What subjects fire my passions for study?
- What courses are there that meet my interests and abilities?
- Where can I study these subjects?
- Are there special requirements or skills needed for this course?
- Is there an additional entry test required for the course?
- Will my chosen course lead to a specific career?
- Does location matter?
- Do I want to be near my family or not?
- Do I want to study and work at the same time?
- Do I want a course that relies on exams, or continuous assessment?
- What extra-curricular activities do I want from a University?
- Do I want to be in a city or a campus university?
- Do I want to live in student halls of residence, or live out, or live at home?

## 2.6 How do I get information to make my decisions?

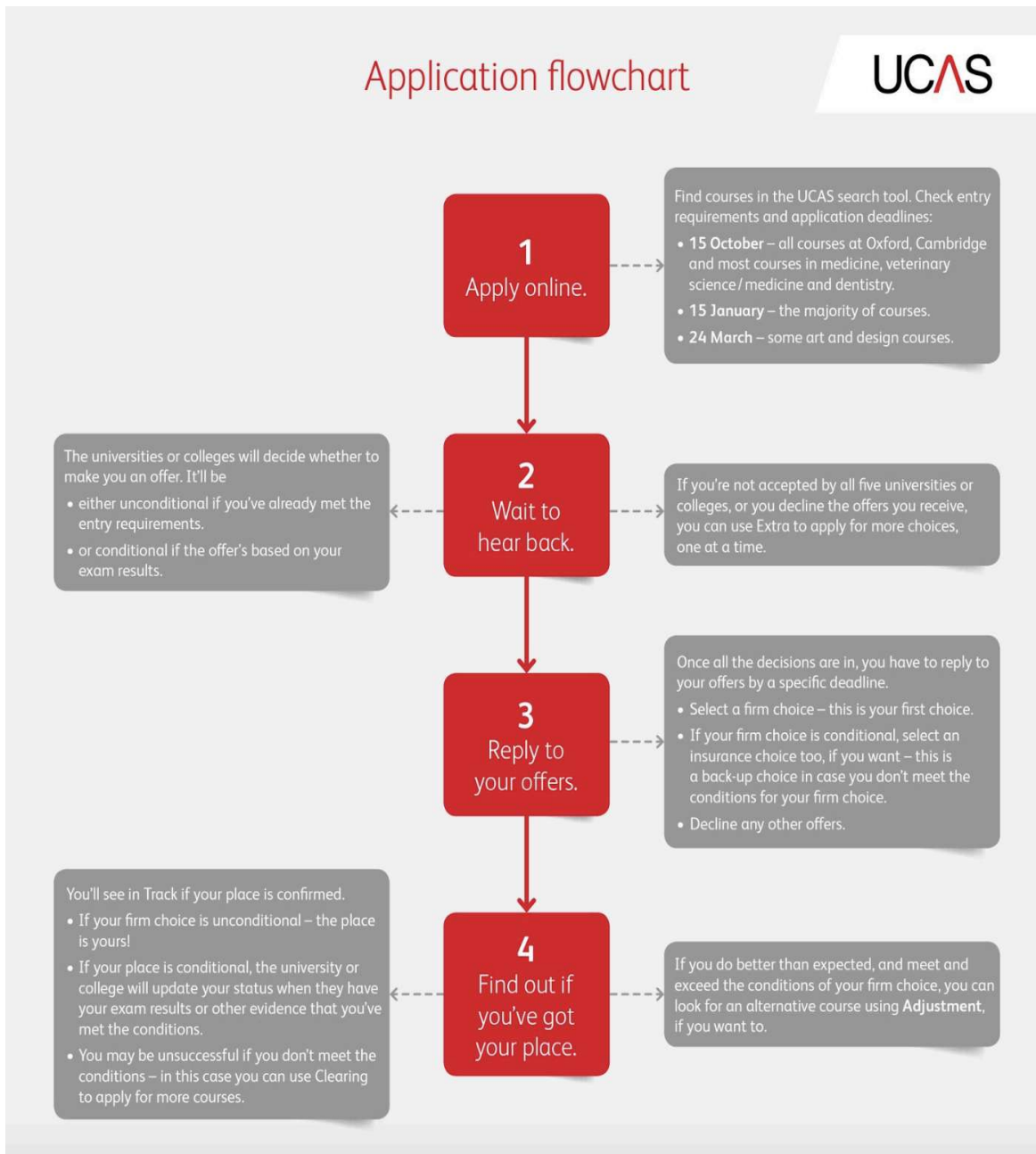
The university comparison websites provided earlier will help you make an informed choice. However, you need to take sufficient time to explore the information that's available from other sources. University open days are an excellent source of information allowing you to visit your proposed institution. They are advertised on individual university websites and can be general or department-specific. UCAS have their own course search engine that you can find on their website, along with conventions that they organise covering the length and breadth of the country (dates and locations are published on the UCAS website [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)). Post-18 pathway advisers (eg SFYP) are happy to discuss your options and bring their perspective and appointments can be arranged by speaking with a member of the sixth form team. Your form tutor is experienced and can offer a great deal of advice. Many universities also offer taster courses within individual departments.



### 3. The university application process

UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is the organisation that manages applications to higher education courses in the UK. UCAS themselves do not make the offer of any place on any course; offers are made by admissions tutors from the individual university departments who inform you via the UCAS system. Applications are sent individually to institutions and universities will not know where else you have applied to. All applications are

made electronically through the UCAS website which is accessed online by means of a secure web-based application system which you will be guided through during school time in the summer term of year 12.



### 3.1 University application process overview

You will set up your application at school on return from study leave after your end of year 12 exams. This is achieved by opening an application via UCAS **HUB** and following the onscreen instructions to create your application. The application is made up of multiple sections

including personal details, additional information, choices, education (academic results), employment and the personal statement. Once you have completed your application, paid and sent it, your academic reference is added by a member of the Sixth Form team which completes your application ahead of it subsequently being submitted to UCAS by a member of staff on your behalf.

The UCAS system goes live from the mid-May of any calendar year in support of applications for courses that start in September of the following year (although deferring for a further year is also an option). You will fill in the bulk of required information on the UCAS website ahead of the summer break, but applications cannot be sent until 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026 at the earliest. Your year 12 summer exam results should be pivotal in helping to inform your decision about course choice; it is important to use the summer term and the summer break to undertake any research and to conduct university visits to ensure wise application choices.

Personal statements should be drafted and refined during the summer term of year 12 and are overseen by experienced form tutors and the Sixth Form team, who are also responsible for writing your reference. The closing date for applications depends on what you want to study and where you want to study it (details of this year's application deadlines are provided as an Appendix).

- Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Science applicants can only make 4 university choices, with a closing date of mid-October
- Students intending to study any subject at Oxford or Cambridge (you cannot apply to both Oxford and Cambridge) have a closing date of mid-October
- For most other students, the closing date is typically mid-January
- Students intending to pursue Art courses typically have a closing date in mid-March

Once completed, you can follow the progress of your applications online using the UCAS **TRACK** system contained within the UCAS **HUB** website. You are able to apply for up to 5 institutions for most courses. Costs increase annually but is typically around £34.50, payable online via debit/credit card. Your reference cannot be added to your application until you have paid online.

### **3.2 What happens after you apply?**

UCAS ensure that the universities that you've selected receive your application. Each university will make their decision based on: -

- Your GCSE grades
- The grades that your teachers have predicted as your most likely outcome at A-level
- Your personal statement
- The reference that your form tutor has written about you
- How closely the information contained within your application fits their entry profile

Some courses require admissions tests to be completed, some courses will require you to attend interview, some will require you to submit work before an offer is made (further details are provided later in this document). Once the decision has been made, the individual institutions inform UCAS and you will learn of those decisions via the UCAS online tracking system. Your applications to each of the institutions will be either accepted with a conditional offer (C), or rejected (REJ). It is becoming increasingly common for unconditional offers to be made but **please exercise caution** with immediately accepting any unconditional offer as it will bind you irreversibly to that university choice with no recourse (unless the university subsequently releases you from it).

Once all decisions have been made, you choose your first (also called 'firm') choice (CF) in addition to an 'insurance' choice (CI). Clearly, your insurance choice offer should be lower than your firm choice offer. Recognise too, that once you accept a firm (CF) offer you cannot decide to change institutions later on.

### 3.3 Further services offered in APPLY

If you do not secure an offer, or decide to change course after the application is complete, you can use the UCAS **EXTRA** system to re-apply (currently at no additional cost).

If you wish to take a year out, you have two avenues open to you:

- You can complete your application as usual but complete the section stating you wish to apply for the following academic year instead
- Alternatively, you can dispense with making an application altogether and look to apply after you have left Hale. If you adopt this approach, the school will endeavour to support your application remotely, but it is important to recognise that this can be a challenging route as you are no longer at school to receive the support and guidance afforded you whilst at school

If you fail to gain grades for both of your firm and insurance offers you can use the UCAS **CLEARING** system.

### 3.4 Your four key choices

1. What subject do you want to study?
2. What kind of course do you want to embark upon?
3. What type of institution do you want to study at?
4. At which university / location would you like to study?

#### 3.4.1 Choosing your subject

To progress with any university application, it makes most sense for you to start with your choice of subject (if you don't choose to pursue a subject that you really enjoy, your motivation to spend three years studying it will soon wain). With more than 100,000 courses spread across

more than 700 universities and colleges, considerable research is required to underpin your choice of course. You will study this subject for the next 3 or 4 years, so being fully committed to the subject is vital – you need to have a passion for it and really enjoy it. You can make up to five course choices, but need to ensure that the choices are for the same or similar subjects e.g History or History and Politics.

You may choose a subject stemming from your A-level courses and interests, where your intellectual curiosity has already been stimulated and your subject knowledge is already of a high standard. You might not want to confine your studies to a single subject; there are a large number of joint or combined honours degree courses available - for example, there are over 400 joint courses available with French. As ever, the best advice is that you choose the subject and course that is right for you, matched to your personal interests and that you enjoy.

If you have already formed some idea about the career you eventually wish to pursue, then a vocational course is a possibility. Indeed, in some cases, it might even be a necessity. If this sounds like you, it is essential that you know what the career actually involves and in particular, the length of the training and the nature of the work. If you are simply attracted to the status and salary of a career and have little or no knowledge of the demands that it will make, then you are approaching the issue in the wrong way and may well be making a very poor choice of subject which can prove a costly mistake in the current climate of hefty tuition fees.

Vocational courses exempt you from some professional examinations, but a vocational degree does not mean that you are committed to follow a particular career - it is a measure of intellectual attainment and not a work-ticket. At least half of all job vacancies (such as in Marketing, Publishing, Management and the Civil Service) are available to graduates in any field and many who do take vocational courses find employment in other areas.

Many parents will be anxious about the choice of degree course you opt for, believing that any such course represents specific training for a specific occupation. Except for vocational courses, this is simply not the case. You are devoting three or four years of your life to the study of a subject because it provides you with an intellectual stimulus and a qualification for careers that are only open to graduates. Practically any degree represents a qualification for entry into literally thousands of different types of employment.

Employers are looking for evidence of academic ability, initiative and determination which are essential attributes required to secure a degree in any subject, be it Accountancy or Classics, Law or Philosophy. The subject matter is far less important than the development of your skills of analysis, evaluation, initiative, communication and presentation. You should therefore not assume that:

- Some degrees are not marketable
- All professions require degrees in specific subjects
- A degree in a particular subject guarantees entry to a chosen career.

Employment is increasingly about the quality of the degree and the quality of the applicant. If there are specific degree requirements for a particular career, now is the time to find out about them. However, success or failure in finding employment upon graduation is often determined by the motivation, personality, work experience, skills and aptitudes of the applicant and the ability to properly construct a CV, complete an application form and to perform well at interview.

Your choice of subject needs extensive research. No one can choose it for you. The earlier you start this process, the better it is and will be hugely beneficial in helping you make the correct decisions. Once you have resolved your subject choice, this then points you in the direction of those institutions where you can study the particular areas of the subject that you favour. Individual prospectuses and departmental open day visits will give you still further information. Once again, it is vital that you should feel personally committed to your chosen subject; you must enjoy studying the subject and it must be your decision!

### 3.4.2 Choosing your type of course

Once you have decided upon a subject of study, you must then investigate the specific features of the courses on offer at the various institutions with a view to finding some that specially appeal. This involves a good deal of research on your part and you must appreciate from the outset that courses differ considerably in both approach and content.

Essentially there are 6 main types of course:

**Single Honours** - one subject studied, within which a range of specialist options is generally provided. There is often a 'Foundation Year' during which several related subjects are studied, though not in any great depth. This leads to the last two years studying chosen options in more depth. This is the most common form of degree.

**Joint Honours** - study of two separate but equal subjects, which may or may not be related (note there is sometimes little co-ordination between the Departments). Examples are History and French. Sometimes there might be a 'major' and a 'minor' subject. Prospectuses will give the detail, so be sure you read the small print.

**Combined Honours** - study of several subjects, which may or may not be related, often narrowing as the course progresses to one or two subjects. Examples are Combined Science or Combined Social Sciences.

**Interdisciplinary Courses** - study of a number of subjects, all related to a particular theme. Examples are American Studies, Environmental Studies, Media Studies.

**Sandwich Courses** - alternating periods of study and related work placements, normally lasting for four years, though some are extended to five years.

**Modular Courses** - a wide variety of 'unit' courses is offered and the student selects his/her own programme, often after a common subject first year. Credits are built up towards a single, joint or combined honours degree.

Courses with the same or similar name (such as History) may vary considerably in content from one institution to another. There are often subsidiary subjects to be taken in conjunction with the main subject (eg Bristol's Modern Languages course includes a foundation course in social sciences; many Mathematics courses have a compulsory Statistics component). Be particularly wary of joint courses with seemingly identical titles. For example, Business Studies **with** German means that Business Studies is the major subject and German is the minor subject; Business Studies **and** German means that equal time is allocated to each subject. Note that not all subjects are offered at every University.

Most courses take three years, but many extend to four, five or six. The latter category includes courses in Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry and Architecture, courses in Scottish Universities and at Brunel and Keele Universities, many Engineering courses, courses with practical training (i.e. most modern languages courses and sandwich courses everywhere) and increasing numbers of courses in Applied Science, Technology and Social Sciences. Courses at the independent University of Buckingham are for two years only, although they comprise 4 terms each year (rather than 3 in most other institutions) with shorter holidays and more contact time.

Many courses in languages, science and engineering (amongst others) offer up to a year of study in outside of the university. Under the Erasmus+ scheme (European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), you might be eligible for an additional grant towards the cost of studying elsewhere in Europe for part of your course. Erasmus+ has helped people of all ages and backgrounds develop and share knowledge and experience at institutions and organisations in different countries, enhancing skills and intercultural awareness and helping people become engaged citizens. In 2019, 44741 participants in 821 UK projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training. That year, Edinburgh, Exeter and Leeds were the top 3 sending institutions with many UK universities offering at least one Erasmus programme.

With the UK's decision to leave the EU, Erasmus opportunities were unavailable for a number of years. However, a recent change has meant that UK students starting university in 2027 will be able to participate in the Erasmus+ scheme (backed by UK dedicating more than £500m to the scheme allowing the UK to rejoin as an 'associated country'). The scheme will allow students to study or work in Europe with grants for living costs. The application process is typically through their universities

- [The UK and Erasmus+](#)

### 3.4.3 Choosing which type of institution to apply to

What should you be looking for in a degree course? Once you know the subject and the type of course you want to study, the final decision to be made is your choice of institution. It is important to recognise that any one university course should not be considered superior to another; instead think of them as simply being different to each other. The 'best course' is the course that suits you best. This also applies to your choice of university – but be sure to select your course before you select your university.

Questions you should ask yourself in relation to your choice of university include:

- Is the course largely theoretical, practical, or vocational?
- What kind of teaching is offered?
  - lectures, tutorials, or both?
  - seminars?
  - how regular are tutorials and seminars?
  - how many students will be at them?
  - are they formal or informal?
- What does the course entail?
  - how much written work?
  - how much laboratory work?
  - are there workshops?
  - is it merely traditional audio-visual teaching?
- How is the degree assessed?
  - final written examinations?
  - continuous assessment?
  - both?
- How much specialisation and how early? How wide is the range of course options?
- How much contact is there with tutors? How much free/study time?
- What library or laboratory facilities are there for this course?
- What is the balance between lectures, tutorials, practical work, projects, dissertations, teamwork and private study?
- Is the stress on personal academic development or on participatory group learning?
- Do final examinations give any exemption from the academic requirements of professional bodies?
- Do I need the structure and discipline of a course with regular assignments and exams?
- Do I need an equivalent monitoring system? Or am I ready for a greater measure of freedom and self-direction?
- What changes, expansion plans or cutbacks are expected, if any?
- What are the Department's views on a GAP year?
- What is the employability record of graduates from this course and in which areas?

Some courses demand your attendance at university for what amounts to a full working day; private study in addition will put your stamina to the test. Some require attendance at relatively

few lectures and seminars or tutorials, but expect you to organise your own time with a full sense of dedication and responsibility. Such courses place great demands on your self-discipline and self-reliance. Some departments offer a degree of academic monitoring which can go as far as a one-to-one tutorial; in others, larger group seminars allow you to feel less closely watched. There can be a strong element of continuous assessment in some courses, while in others the whole strain of achievement falls on the final examinations. You really must assess your own temperament, honesty and recognise the conditions under which you work well. This is why detailed research is essential; the principal reason for students dropping out of university is insufficient prior knowledge of the content of the course and of the demands it makes of the individual.

If you are planning to study a “new” subject at university (ie one not linked to your A-level studies), then some background reading is essential. You need to be certain that you have a genuine academic interest in the discipline concerned. In choosing a course, you should be confident that it matches your interests, abilities and plans. However, there is another important factor – you must be confident that you have a decent chance of getting in! This consideration is intimately linked with your choice of universities.

You should consult the UCAS Course Search section of the website for a comparison of courses, while Brian Heap’s *Degree Course Offers* is practically statutory reading (a copy is in the library). By the end of July, you should have drawn up a short list of university courses for your Higher Education submission. Compare the prospectuses and begin settling on your final choice of five universities. Holiday and Open Day visits will provide you with more information and you are strongly recommended to undertake at least one visit.

### **3.4.3.1 Types of universities**

Every university has a distinct character of its own. Some are large, others are small and intimate. Some are in the centres of big towns and cities and have a strongly urban character. Others are to be found in suburbs or in the country. Some have buildings scattered about a town centre. Others are concentrated on one site, commonly called a 'campus'. Some campuses are central and tightly packed. Others are out of town, self-contained and pleasantly landscaped. Wherever you choose to apply, you must select the kind of places which will suit you best and offer the kind of environment and activities from which you will benefit.

Traditional universities fall broadly into the following categories: -

#### **Civic Universities**

Sited centrally in and interacting closely with a major city. Halls of Residence (often some distance from the University) form separate and lively communities. Examples include Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, and Sheffield.

### **City Campus Universities**

Universities that have developed just outside their cities. Birmingham, Exeter, Nottingham and Reading have sites large enough to contain academic buildings and a large proportion of residential accommodation. Hull and Leicester have academic sites a mile or so from the city centre and accommodation complexes two miles further out. Southampton is on the outskirts of the city with scattered Halls of Residence.

### **Greenfield Campus Universities**

Mainly the 1960's wave of new universities established on greenfield sites and designed as self-sufficient, self-contained social and academic units. East Anglia, Essex, Keele, Sussex, Warwick and York.

### **Collegiate Universities**

Oxford, Cambridge (and in a different way Durham and Lancaster).

### **London**

Each constituent college is of the size of a full-scale university and functions as such.

### **Wales**

Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Swansea are a group of universities with a federal structure.

### **Technological Universities**

Have their roots in the old technical and technological colleges with close links to industry. They offer courses with strong practical and technological bias on hi-tech modern campuses. Examples include Aston, Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City, Loughborough, Salford, Surrey, UMIST.

### **Scottish Universities**

Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt, St Andrews, Stirling and Strathclyde. All Scottish universities offer four year courses. They are unusual in that the open structure of most degree courses (Medicine, Law and Divinity are generally exceptions) enables maximum flexibility in choice of course. In other words, you are admitted to a faculty and not a department. Students in the faculties of arts, sciences and social sciences normally select three or four subjects in their first year from a wide range of possible courses, extending over several distinct study areas. As students are not normally admitted into honours courses until the end of their second year, they can experiment (in both known and unknown areas of study) before coming to a final decision. All applicants within a faculty are made the same conditional offer and there are seldom any interviews.

### **Irish Universities**

Northern Ireland, Queen's Belfast and Ulster.

### **New Universities**

Former polytechnics which became universities in their own right in 1992. All award their own degrees and offer a full range of courses, both vocational and non-vocational, at degree and diploma level. They are often an amalgamation of several former colleges and are sometimes spread across a number of campuses. Many have a close liaison with industry; examples include Hertfordshire, Oxford Brookes, Northumbria, Nottingham Trent and Bristol UWE.

### **3.4.3.2 Russell Group universities**

The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector. The group formed as a result of a meeting held in Russell Square in 1994 and have since grown to now become an association of major research-intensive universities, committed to maintaining the highest standards of research, education and knowledge transfer possible. Their aim is to help ensure that their member universities have the optimum conditions in which to flourish and continue to make social, economic and cultural impacts through their world-leading research and teaching. This collection of world-class universities plays an important part in the intellectual life of the UK and have huge social, economic and cultural impacts locally, across the UK and around the globe. Although the group representing just 12% of the higher education sector, a research assessment exercise in 2008 identified that more than 60% of the very best ('world leading') research took place in Russell Group universities. Further detail about the Russell Group may be found on their website

#### [Who we are | Russell Group](#)

- Birmingham
- Bristol
- Cambridge
- Cardiff
- Durham
- Edinburgh
- Exeter
- Glasgow
- Imperial College, London
- King's College, London
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Nottingham
- Queen Mary University of London
- Queen's University, Belfast
- Oxford

- Sheffield
- Southampton
- University College, London (UCL)
- Warwick
- York

Those interested in applying to universities in the USA, Republic of Ireland or elsewhere in the EU, should seek guidance from a member of the Sixth Form team.

### 3.4.4 Choosing which institution / location to apply to

It is essential that you should apply to universities where you have a realistic chance of acceptance, and where the right courses and learning conditions are available. Only you can establish what are the right courses and learning conditions: no two applicants are likely to take the same view.

The questions most frequently asked are “Which is the best university for studying subject X?” or simply “Which is the best university?”. These are unhelpful questions and ones incapable of definitive answers, even though publications such as *The Times Guide* produce university league tables which profess to show the best universities and courses. All universities have their peculiar strengths and weaknesses. It is dangerous to rely upon the accumulated wisdom (sometimes simply thinly disguised prejudice) of parents, teachers and friends. Reputation can also prove an unreliable measure of quality given that staff and course changes are constantly taking place.

Many factors influence the choice of university and given that you have only 5 choices, detailed research before making a decision is essential. You should visit universities on open days which can run at weekends or during school days (for which up to 3 days’ absence from school is permitted if you advise the sixth form team in advance). A useful searchable database for open days at institution around the country can be found at

- [Search the Opendays.com calendar of university and college open days - search for an open day](#)

You should read the official university prospectuses, together with ‘alternative prospectuses’ (published by students) where they exist. You should also consult the extensive information available on individual university websites. Once you have decided on your subject and course, you should consider seriously the following factors:

#### **Institution size and facilities**

Sports, social, career-related activities? How social are you? University life is socially intense and exposed. Are you gregarious or outgoing enough to enjoy the closed society of a small university or collegiate unit which is remote from a large town or city and which creates its own world? Or do you like the idea of an easy escape into a larger, wider community which offers you a second different world?

### **Institution location**

In a city centre? (e.g. Leeds, Newcastle) – campuses on the edge of town? (e.g. Reading, Exeter) – in ancient buildings in a small city? (e.g. Durham, St Andrews) – in a rural location? (e.g. Keele). Distance from home? Cost of travel?

### **Institution accommodation**

Halls of Residence? Self-catering? Approved lodgings? Flats? Bed-sits? Availability of each? Location of each? Cost of each?

So which are the most popular universities (ie most over-subscribed)? You might be forgiven for thinking that it's the prestigious universities that are the most highly sought after (Durham, Oxford and Cambridge) but the statistics clearly show that these institutions are notably unpopular (Cambridge had just 6.15 applicants competing for each place, Oxford 7.43 and Durham 7.34). UCAS data shows that LSE is the university with the most applicants in the UK. Of the 26240 students who applied to the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2023, only 1,815 managed to secure a place – 14.46 applicants per place. As well as world-class social science teaching, LSE prides itself on its “international community”, with around three quarters of students at the university coming from 160 countries around the world.

Manchester received the highest number of applications out of all the Russell Group universities with 93,450 people applying for 9,630 places to join the university in 2023 – 9.70 applicants per place. By contrast, Oxford and Cambridge (where the admissions processes are longer) result in fewer applicants. At Cambridge, 21,940 people applied for 3,565 places (6.15 applicants per place), whilst those 24,230 Oxford applicants resulted in 3,260 were accepted (7.43 applicants per place).

Although data is published on the UCAS website (including the number of applicants and entrants at all universities and higher education institutions in the UK), a simplified summary can be found at this link: -

- [Ranked: These are officially the most oversubscribed Russell Group universities](#)

## **3.5 Entrance Requirements**

Each course has its own tariff; information about course entry requirements is available from the UCAS Course Search on their website (note that these grades are not in any way binding on Admissions Tutors and simply serve to provide you a guideline; a large number of applicants can result in the raising of entry grades in practice and vice versa).

You must be realistic about your choices based on these tariffs. Admissions tutors will look at your GCSE and predicted A-level/BTEC grades when deciding to offer you a conditional place. If you apply for courses with unrealistic entry requirements, you are unlikely to get offers. You need to select courses with a similar range of grade requirements/tariffs to maximise your chances of success but it is essential that you research the various options carefully before applying.

### 3.6 Prospectuses, visits and open days

University prospectuses can be glossy exercises in marketing, the range, quality and accuracy of which can be variable. Some of the claims made are hard to square with the realities revealed by a visit reinforcing the value of attending an open day at a proposed university choice. Alternative prospectuses (produced by students) are usually readable and informative, but can be uneven and highly subjective and you are advised to treat all such literature with caution. All universities have websites with access usually available through [www.universityname.ac.uk](http://www.universityname.ac.uk). (see appendix).

All universities also offer one or more so called 'Open Days' which provide you with an opportunity to talk with academic staff and students in addition to securing a 'feel' for the atmosphere of the institution. The value of this exercise can vary from place to place and you should select your open days carefully. Those open days organised by university subject departments are invariably more useful than general university open days.

Remember that repeated absence from School will disrupt your academic programme and therefore jeopardise your academic progress and thus your prospects of university admission; for this reason, we restrict you to **a maximum of three visits** in school time, although a number of open days occur at weekends reducing the impact upon your studies.

## 4. Your university application

Your university application will be made electronically through the UCAS system, full guidance for which will be provided to you during the summer term of year 12 and / or the first term of year 13. Your application will contain your personal details, your academic profile to date and your personal statement (all of which you are responsible for entering). Once finalised, a member of the Sixth Form team will check your application, add in a reference (that your form tutor authors) and cite our best professional judgement as to the grades that we feel you are most likely to achieve (which is largely based on your academic profile to date).

University admissions tutors will be looking at your application for specific evidence of the qualities, attributes, skills and academic profile that qualify you for your chosen course. Entry profiles required for specific courses are therefore very important when deciding upon your course choice. Departments state the academic mix of A Levels they are looking for, as well as

the skills and experiences students are required to have when applying. You need to make sure that you read these very carefully before choosing a course as fitting their expected profile will give you a much stronger chance of securing the offer of a place.

Each University / Department has a different emphasis, but the basic considerations are: -

### **Academic achievement**

GCSE, AS and A-level results already taken. Range of subjects studied. Time taken to obtain GCSE passes. For some highly competitive subjects / institutions a minimum GCSE hurdle may be set for admission (for example, Medicine tends to require 6 or more A/A\* grades at GCSE, whilst Oxbridge colleges will typically be expecting to see 6 or more A\* grades at GCSE and predictions of A\*AA at A-level as a minimum.

### **Performance in admissions tests**

These have proven to be a very strong selector (and de-selector) for specific courses and are becoming an increasingly popular alternative to relying solely on predicted A-level grades in order to differentiate between applicants. Some admissions tests are course-specific (eg if you want to read Medicine you will be required to take the UCAT); whilst some admissions tests are institution-specific. You will find a lot of guidance on the internet to help you prepare properly, so be sure to make the most of the help that's out there. A good start point for current admissions tests may be found at: -

- [University Admissions Tests | UCAS | UCAT, BMAT, LNAT And More](#)

### **Interviews**

In the case of those universities basing their selection in part on interview; do you offer evidence that you have done more than simply absorb passively what you have been taught? Do you have an obvious capacity for independent academic and personal development? Can you think on your feet? Would you be interesting / rewarding to teach?

### **Current progress in A Level subjects and predicted A Level grades**

Details of your current performance and predicted A-level grades will be contained within your UCAS application reference and will provide admissions tutors a good steer as to your academic ability. In this regard, your performance in year 12 is particularly important (which will be guided by your end of year 12 internal summer exam results).

### **Academic potential**

Interest in subject; academic strengths and weaknesses revealed in the application or at interview; academic motivation; indications that you will make a success of a degree course (new pattern of work and teaching methods); awareness of what chosen course entails.

### **Personal qualities**

Powers of expression, independence of mind, industry, determination, sense of responsibility, realism of assessment of own abilities; sense of purpose; ability to meet deadlines; in other words, they will look at your 'teachability'. Admission tutors will be looking for people who are committed to their learning.

### **Interests**

A good entry that is convincing can assist a borderline candidate. You must provide evidence of enthusiasm and commitment to your chosen course; references to relevant study and work experience are particularly important, in addition to providing an indication of the contribution that you have potential to make towards university life.

## **4.1 Your personal statement - new format (3 questions)**

You are required to complete a personal statement in support of your application. It remains a crucial part of your UCAS application, often influencing whether you receive offers - especially for competitive courses. Support will be provided through tutorials, and you should seek feedback from teachers, your form tutor, or year head throughout the drafting process.

Although the format has changed, the core purpose is the same: to present a clear, authentic, and evidence-based case for why you are a strong candidate.

### **General Expectations**

- Write clearly, accurately, and in **good English** (spelling, punctuation, grammar all matter).
- Avoid exaggeration, clichés, or including trivial details.
- Focus on quality over quantity - thoughtful examples are far more effective than long lists.
- Be honest and ensure you can discuss anything you include if asked at interview.

### **Question 1: Why do you want to study this course?**

This replaces the traditional "introduction." Your focus here is your **academic motivation and subject interest**.

You should:

- Clearly explain why you have chosen this course.
- Demonstrate genuine interest and curiosity, using specific examples.
- Refer to:
  - Topics or areas of the subject that particularly interest you

- Lessons, projects, coursework, or practical work
- Reading, research, or super-curricular activities beyond the syllabus
- Show how your interest has developed over time.
- If relevant, explain links between your A-levels (or equivalent) and your chosen course.
- For joint honours, address both subjects.
- If you haven't studied the subject formally, explain what has attracted you and how you have explored it independently.

**Avoid:** vague statements like “I am passionate about Biology.”

**Instead:** give precise, evidence-based examples of what sparked and sustained your interest.

## **Question 2: How have your qualifications and studies helped you prepare?**

This section focuses on your academic skills and subject readiness.

You should:

- Highlight relevant academic achievements and experiences, such as:
  - Coursework, EPQ, investigations, or research
  - Subject-related competitions, societies, or masterclasses
- Explain the skills you have developed, for example:
  - Research and analysis
  - Critical thinking
  - Problem-solving
  - Communication
- Provide specific examples showing how you used or developed these skills.
- If you have supported others (e.g. mentoring), explain what you learned from this.

The emphasis should be on:

- How your studies have prepared you for degree-level work
- Evidence of your intellectual engagement, not just attainment

## **Question 3: What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?**

This combines what used to be the “skills and qualities” section.

You should:

- Include relevant extracurricular and super-curricular activities, such as:
  - Work experience (especially important for courses like Medicine or Law)
  - Volunteering or charity work
  - Positions of responsibility

- Team activities, music, drama, or other interests
- Explain:
  - What you did
  - What skills or qualities you developed
  - Why these are relevant to your course or university life
- Possible skills to evidence include:
  - Teamwork
  - Leadership
  - Time management
  - Communication
  - Initiative
  - Organisation
  - Adaptability
- If you are planning a gap year, briefly explain:
  - Your reasons
  - Your intended activities and how they will develop your skills

**Important:**

Do not simply list activities - reflect on them and explain their value.

**Final Checks Before Submission**

Once you've drafted all three sections of your personal statement, your form tutor will be happy to review it and offer guidance on its content and how it might be improved. Through an iterative cycle of redrafting and reviewing, you will reach a final version that you are ready to upload to the UCAS website. Before doing so, consider having another adult check it. Here are some key questions to ask them about its content (you are aiming for the answer 'yes' to all of them; if any answers are 'no', your personal statement can be improved and you should seek to refine it further).

- Do my introductory sentences hold your attention?
- Is the reason for my course choice obvious?
- Have I demonstrated that I know what my chosen course entails?
- Is my reading around my subject apparent and does it demonstrate understanding?
- Are the skills that I have developed apparent and evidenced?
- Are my current plans beyond university apparent?
- Is my application free of any grammatical errors and spelling mistakes?
- Are all parts of my application backed by cited evidence?
- Does my final statement sound positive and does it cover university life beyond just studying?

In today's 'AI-enriched' world, you may be tempted to have Chat-GPT, Grok, or similar author your personal statement for you. Be warned, this would be a mistake! UCAS are adept at identifying paragraphs that are not your own with sophisticated software on hand. Remember,

a personal statement is exactly as described – it's personal to you, so it needs to be written by you.

## **4.2 Specialist applications – Oxford and Cambridge**

To apply to Oxford or Cambridge you need to be aware that there are some differences from applying to other institutions. A UCAS application to Oxford or Cambridge (never both) must be received by UCAS by mid-October of the year prior to starting your proposed undergraduate course. You are not permitted to apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same academic year. You may, as is the case for any UCAS application, name up to four other universities on your form, although candidates for medicine may name only three other universities on their UCAS form for medical courses.

Oxbridge application is undeniably designed for bright, highly-motivated and hard-working candidates. The competition for places is particularly stiff and applications are always numerous (although 2018 saw the number of applications for Love Island exceed the number of applications for Oxford and Cambridge universities combined, perhaps providing a sad reflection on the aspirations of today's younger generation).

Cambridge typically receives in excess of 17000 applications for approximately 3500 places. State applicants gained 62.5% of places and 97.7% of accepted students achieved A\*AA (or better) in their A-level exams. It's also worth noting that 4,832 students that secured A\*AA at A level failed to gain an offer from the Cambridge university in a recent analysis.

Oxford typically receives in excess of 19,000 applications for approximately 3200 places with around 50% of all offers being made to state school students. With highly competitive courses, it is clear that careful planning and research is required to maximise your chance of receiving an offer to study for a degree at either institution. Much advice is available to those willing to ask and to listen carefully before committing yourself to an application. Some students might be better opting for post A-level entry, when they are more academically mature and when their A-level results are known. A candidate without real intellectual enthusiasm and commitment should, of course, not apply at all.

The number of applicants to Oxbridge continues to rise and application is always competitive. Given the low success rates, candidates must recognise and be prepared to be rejected and realise that such disappointment will come at a critical point in Year 13 when they may well be taking modules for their A-level exams. Significant personal resilience is essential for unsuccessful candidates who will need to set aside disappointment such that they can continue to work purposefully towards achieving their very best A-level outcomes, requiring an abundance of determination and tenacity.



### 4.2.1 Oxford

Oxford have changed their policy of applications to move more in line with Cambridge, with A\*AA grade offers now representing the norm. However, this is no guarantee of success with some courses requiring even higher grades. Admissions tutors will also be looking at GCSE results, with at least six A\* grades and the rest being A's being an increasingly expected norm.

You can apply to a specific college or make an open application, the choice is yours. Research colleges carefully; useful information is to be gained by attending a college open day and by looking at the college's own prospectus and website. Read their prospectus, canvas students' views directly during a visit, or use online sources. If you choose a college be sure to select one that you feel suits you best and be prepared to rationalise your choice at interview.

Alternatively, you can make an open application and leave the decision to the Admissions Office computer (as 20% of applicants do). You will be no worse off as the best candidates are just as likely to be offered a place whether they choose a college or not. However, if you are successful with an open application, you are not at liberty to change the college that you are allocated. So, if there are any colleges you do not want to go to, you should name a first choice in your application.

All prospective candidates should consult the *Oxford Undergraduate Prospectus* which can be found online. Colleges and departments issue their own prospectuses and these are also available via the university website ([www.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ox.ac.uk)).

#### 4.2.1.1 Oxford admissions tests and additional application materials

At least 70% of students applying to Oxford will be required to take a pre-interview selection test. This information can be found on-line at [www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/apply/](http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/apply/). This outlines the information about the tests, the materials used and any further guidance for preparation you can use.

In general, written work will be required (in early November) in the case of candidates for Archaeology and Anthropology, Biological Sciences, Classics, Economics and Management, English, Geography, History, Law, Modern languages, Music, Oriental Studies, PPE, Psychology, Theology and Human Sciences.

Tests will generally be set for applicants at the time of interview in Biological Sciences, Classics, Economics and Management, English, History, Law, Mathematics, Medicine, Modern Languages,

Music, PPE, Physics (in Mathematics only) and Psychology. There is increasing inter-collegiate co-operation, with test papers and written work often passed from College to College; in science subjects applicants are ranked on the basis of (a) GCSE and AS level results in legacy subjects (b) UCAS forms (c) interview performance (d) test results.

Offers are made just before Christmas, and confirmation of places is conditional upon achieving specific grades in A-level examinations - A\*AA is the most common offer but some can be A\*A\*A and usually that you have 7 or more A\* grades at GCSE.



### 4.2.2 Cambridge

As with Oxford, Cambridge requires application via the UCAS application form. However, students will also have to complete the on-line Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ). This is accessed via the university website [www.cam.ac.uk/admissions](http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions). Most applicants are required to take a subject-specific written admission assessment, either pre-interview or at interview. In addition, some Colleges ask applicants for some courses to submit examples of their written work (perhaps one or two school essays) which may then be discussed at interview.

All prospective applicants should consult the Cambridge Undergraduate Prospectus, which can be found online or in the school library. Many colleges and departments also issue their own prospectuses.

You must be admitted as a member of a college and details of Cambridge colleges can be found in their prospectus. On your UCAS application form you simply nominate one college or make an open application. Most colleges are very similar, although there are some postgraduate-only and single-gender colleges. You can apply to a specific college or make an open application, the choice is yours and useful information can be gained by attending an open day. Look at the college's own prospectus and website, read the prospectus, offering the students' views. Key reasons for choosing a specific college would be the courses they offer, the location and size of the college and the facilities they offer students. Be prepared to rationalise your choice at interview.

You can make an open application and leave the decision to the admissions office computer. However, with an open application, you cannot change the college which you are allocated. So, if there are any colleges you do not want to go to, you should name a first choice. Also, be aware that individual colleges assess students in different ways.

### **4.2.2.1 Cambridge admissions tests and additional application materials**

Colleges will be most likely to make A\*AA offers as a minimum entry requirement. Some courses will require A\*A\*A and typically that you have secured seven or more A\* grades at GCSE.

For candidates in mathematics, Cambridge will continue to make use of the STEP examination (Sixth Term Examination Paper), sat at the same time as A-level exams. Entries for STEP papers are made through the usual school examination entrance system and you should seek input from a member of the sixth form team to ensure that this happens in a timely fashion. STEP is used primarily by Cambridge, Warwick, and Imperial.

Cambridge will require you to take an admission test for most subjects, including (but not restricted to):

- Test of Mathematics for University Admission (TMUA)
- Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) - replaced at Oxford with Test of Academic Reasoning for Admissions (TARA)
- University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT)
- Engineering and Science Admissions Test (ESAT) - replaces ENGAA, NSAA, and Oxford's PAT and BMSAT and used by Cambridge, Oxford, and Imperial for most Engineering and Science-based degrees
- Test of Academic Reasoning for Admissions (TARA) - replaces TSA at Oxford for courses like PPE, Economics & Management, and Psychology. It is a non-subject specific test of academic reasoning and critical thinking skills
- The Law National Aptitude Test (LNAT) - still required for Law at universities like Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, LSE, and King's College London .

There are special arrangements for Organ, Choral and Instrumental Awards at Oxbridge; prospective candidates should consult the Oxford and Cambridge prospectuses and discuss their intentions with a member of the sixth form team.

### **4.2.3 The case for making an Oxbridge application**

If you have any aspirations towards reading a subject at Oxford or Cambridge, be reassured that we run a program in school that is designed to help you prepare properly for the very special demands that are required by these institutions that aims to maximise your chances of success. With this goal in mind, you are expected to join the in-house Oxbridge program group should you be considering an application. You should look carefully at the college prospectuses and other literature. Candidates will also be offered the opportunity of mock interviews that take place during the first term of year 13, using both internal and external interviewers.

Securing a place at Oxford or Cambridge is very difficult. To be a candidate with any reasonable chance of success, you should be confident of achieving at least one A\* grade at A-level (or at the very least AAA though this kind of offer is less often seen) and you should also have A and A\* grades in most or ideally all of your GCSE subjects. Cambridge science admissions tutors have stated that any candidate without a minimum of five A\* grades or with any B or C grades is immediately viewed with suspicion; moreover, breadth across GCSE's (ie not simply excellence in arts or science subjects) is seen as very important. In addition to academic ability, admissions tutors are looking for potential, motivation and commitment to your proposed subject. They want evidence that you will cope with a demanding course and that you will be able to cope with a teaching system that depends to a large extent on individual initiative. It is widely recognised that grades alone are not always the best indication of academic ability, potential and enthusiasm.

The wider your reading in the months ahead, the more resources you will have to draw upon. The interview is, of course, critical and it is not always appreciated that Oxbridge applications are conducted by subject tutors (ie by the very people who will be teaching you if you secure an undergraduate place). Nevertheless, Oxbridge colleges admit undergraduates strictly on merit, based as much on the apparent potential of the applicants as on their actual achievements at the time of applying.

#### **4.2.3.1 Breaking some stereotypes**

Colleges do not operate on a quota basis, be it gender or type of school. Highly motivated and intellectually curious candidates have an excellent chance of entry. There are however no 'easy' colleges and no 'easy' courses, although some colleges and courses may be less hard to get into! As a general rule, modern colleges on the edge of town and permanent private halls at Oxford have lower applicants to places ratios. Extra-curricular achievements and thorough knowledge of the A-level syllabus are no substitute for academic motivation and intellectual curiosity, whilst family connections are wholly irrelevant to the business of selection. There is also some evidence that candidates for deferred entry are at a significant disadvantage in many arts subjects and in medicine, unless they are absolutely outstanding. Always check with your intended college to gauge their attitude towards deferred entry.

The prospectuses describe in detail what admissions tutors are looking for - they want "evidence that the candidate is genuinely interested in, and enthused by, issues involved in the subject; signs of an ability to focus precisely on topics, to grasp what the problems are in particular areas and to rigorously analyse and understand the way that different arguments move to resolve these difficulties; preparedness to think for themselves, to try out options and to examine carefully their own intuitions. In short, candidates must demonstrate strong motivation, analytical rigour and intellectual creativity". The College is able "to discriminate between the genuinely talented and the merely well-trained". To quote Dinah Birch, Admissions Tutor at Trinity College, Oxford: "We want two things from our students - ability and commitment. The only thing the students have in common is intellectual energy and drive - there is no such thing as the typical Oxbridge student".

If you meet the above requirements, then you have a very decent chance of securing admission. You will have already identified yourself through your appetite for reading, your clarity of thinking, your capacity to consider and to react to new ideas, your ability to communicate (both orally and on paper) and your very obvious enthusiasm for your chosen subject.

#### 4.2.4 Specialist applications – Medicine

Medicine is an extremely competitive degree course, with 24000-26000 applications each year for about 8100 to 8500 places (this means about 3 applicants per place on average, though this is much higher for international students). The offer at Cambridge is A\*AA which is aligned with most London medical schools; AAA is the standard offer for most Russell Group Medical schools. Candidates narrowly missing the terms of the offer are unlikely to be admitted and re-take candidates have a very slim chance of entry. An early application is essential and there is a deadline of mid-October for receipt of medical applications at UCAS. It is relatively rare for candidates to receive more than two offers and many institutions will not interview or notify applicants of their decisions until February or even March of the year following application. Some good candidates are put on waiting lists and this can account for the absence of Clearing places in August. You are allowed to select a maximum of four institutions on your UCAS form and you are advised to make all four choices.

All candidates should discuss their applications strategy with a member of the sixth form team in addition to their tutor during the summer term of year 12. Prospective applicants for medicine are encouraged to read Medicine entry guides; for example:

- [UCAS Medicine Application Guide & Timeline 2026: A Comprehensive Guide | UCAS | 2026 | TheUKCATPeople](#)
- [Applying to medical school](#)

You should be aware that Medicine is one of the longest courses of study for any degree and so you must be utterly convinced that this is what you want to do with your working life. A career in Medicine is academically, physically and emotionally challenging and you need to be a particularly robust individual to cope with all of its demands and rigour. Following the CMC recommendation, medical schools have introduced new curricula, with more integration of the pre-clinical and clinical courses, less emphasis on factual information and far more time devoted to communications skills and practical clinical tasks. Accordingly, there is far more 'self-learning', as well as more group and individual work. You qualify at the end of your fifth year, there is then a pre-registration year as a house officer in a general hospital (be warned, this is a period of intense, very hard work with very long hours and increasing responsibilities). Upon successful conclusion of this year, application can be made for full registration with the CMC.

Applicants called for interview will face searching questions about their motivation, their work at school and their personal interests. A key question will be your reasons for wanting to become a doctor and you will need to describe and evidence the key personal qualities required

(eg compassion, teamwork, communication, resourcefulness, boundless energy and perseverance). There is, however, no uniformity of selection policies and individual medical schools have different views about the characteristics that make a good medical student and a good doctor. What they are all looking for is unambiguous evidence that you will be a valuable and successful member of a caring community. For your application to be taken seriously, you will need to demonstrate all of the following:

- A clear sense of vocation
- Self-motivation and excellent organisation (with evidence from your present work and activities)
- Practical concern for the welfare of others (through, for example, voluntary or charity work)
- Good communication skills
- Determination, perseverance, resilience, enthusiasm and the ability to make a success of the course
- A curiosity about the scientific basis of medicine
- Humanity, teamwork, compassion and patience
- Originality and initiative; curiosity and creativity; flexibility
- Integrity, modesty and a sense of humour
- Breadth of interests and achievements (showing you can achieve and cope with a busy lifestyle at the same time)
- Leadership skills and the ability to accept responsibility, and to make difficult decisions
- Awareness of current medical "issues" (such as embryology and the human genome project)
- Awareness of current NHS 'issues' (such as funding and waiting lists)
- Good physical and mental health (certain medical conditions may preclude you from a career in Medicine)

Many of these qualities form part of the entry profiles run by medical schools and you will be asked about them either at interview or before interview in a screening questionnaire. Each medical school publishes details of its entry criteria on its website and you should consult these at an early stage in your research. You may have to go away and quickly gain relevant experience or evidence of the qualities they are looking for, although forward planning is always valuable and using your summer break at the end of year 12 provides an excellent opportunity to secure real experience that you can use to evidence the skills, attributes and qualities required. In this light, consider a pastime that demonstrates evidence that you are dextrous – brilliant would-be surgeons that cannot join two pieces of string with a knot are unlikely to impress at interview.

#### **4.2.4.1 Types of medical course**

Medical courses fall into 3 different categories: -

- Problem-based learning (PBL)

- Integrated
- Traditional

The main differences reside in the 'pre-clinical' style of teaching. 'Clinical' teaching is similar for all three types of course and is based in the hospital or in primary care with teaching being performed in small groups from clinicians. It is important that you look into the different courses on offer - read the prospectuses and look on the internet before you apply. However, sometimes there is not a clear divide of the courses, and some integrated courses will also have some PBL and vice-versa.

### **Problem-based learning (PBL)**

This is a new dynamic style of course which has been praised by the General Medical Council (a sort of 'government' for doctors). Pioneered by medical school such as Liverpool and Manchester, the course is taught with a patient-orientated approach from day one and students are heavily involved in clinical scenarios from the first year. This type of course requires a great deal of self-motivation as its emphasis is on self-directed learning and therefore those who are used to spoon feeding of information may take some time to adjust. Teaching styles vary from place to place, but generally consist of small group tutor led teaching with computer work, practical sessions and a large amount of time for personal study. It is still unknown whether this type of course is the better way to teach medicine than the others. Universities offering this type of course include Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Queen Mary, Peninsula, Sheffield, Keele, Hull and York, Barts, East Anglia.

### **Integrated or systems-based**

This type of course is run at the majority of UK medical schools such as Birmingham and Leeds and was devised under recommendation of the GMC after it published the guidelines. It sits as a compromise between a traditional style course and a PBL course. Although these courses generally claim to have patient contact from day one, this varies in the amount from place to place but is often quite limited in the first year to local community visits. The amount of patient contact increases as the years progress with there still being a slight divide between pre-clinical and clinical years. Most students are happy with only having limited contact with patients in year one as they feel that at this point they do not have sufficient clinical knowledge base to approach patients on the wards. Teaching is based on body systems such as the digestive system, learning the anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and biochemistry of the relevant system and clinical knowledge is also supplemented. There is also an emphasis on teaching communication skills and understanding the local community. This type of teaching is a mixture between lectures, tutorials, self-directed learning (and hospital work in later years) and is suitable for all types of people from those who are used to spoon-feeding to more individual workers.

### **Traditional or subject-based**

This type of course is a bit of a rarity in the new world of medical education. Limited to

establishments such as Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews, there is a definite pre-clinical/clinical divide and the pre-clinical years are taught very rigidly in subjects. In some of these institutions you may have to apply again for a 'clinical' place and your clinical place may not even be in the city you started! For example, St. Andrew's students finish their clinical years in Manchester and some Oxbridge students finish their years in London. This is definitely a course for the scientifically-minded and it could potentially be easy to lose motivation due to the complete lack of patient contact in the pre-clinical years. Also, students tend to feel a little unprepared and isolated when they take their first steps into hospital in the clinical years. This type of degree offers much more scope to complete research (such as a Masters or PhD) without overly disrupting your degree. Definitely a choice for those with a great deal of motivation and those that like the idea of studying a science degree before embarking on clinical studies.

#### 4.2.4.2 UCAT

The BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) used to be an undergraduate admissions test widely used by UK universities for applicants to Medicine, Biomedical Sciences and Dentistry course. As of 2024, the BMAT no longer exists and has been replaced by the University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT).

The UCAT test is the main test used by Medical Schools and departments, typically taking place between the beginning of July and the beginning of October. You will be required to complete a two-step process using the Pearson VUE online registration system to register and subsequently book a test, which you will be required to take at a local centre. It is your responsibility to register for the test.

Useful UCAT link: -

- [Register | UCAT Consortium](#)

Students should make use the online past papers and guides to prepare for the UCAT. Your UCAS personal statement is absolutely critical in the selection process and you should prepare drafts and discuss it with your tutor and / or any member of the sixth form team. You should remember that it will need to impress admissions tutors and stand out from those of other good applicants, thus your passion for choosing to study medicine must come across very clearly, together with your motivation and commitment in addition to your ability to deal with stress.

Highlight any efforts you have made to discover more about the reality of medical practice and include details of relevant work experience. Avoid simply citing when and where you secured experience; instead describe what you learned from it and how it influenced your decision to choose medicine as a career. You are at a very serious disadvantage if you have arranged no work experience and those of an extended variety are the more impressive, as it not only helps you to discover things about your own character (stamina, commitment, maturity) but will also

serve to help you to clarify your interest in medicine in your application and / or interview. Wider reading on medical and ethical issues can be advantageous and help can be given by your teachers or a member of the sixth form team as to the type of books you should be reading. Admissions tutors are also looking for information about your interests, activities and achievements (both in and out of school), especially those which demonstrate qualities such as teamwork, initiative and concern for others. Evidence of community service is often an important factor as well, so factor these thoughts into your year 12 and early year 13 plans accordingly. Most medical schools use interview as part of the selection process and the proportion of applicants obtaining interviews varies considerably. In the past, Edinburgh and Southampton have made offers without interviews; at the latter, the UCAS form is scrutinised separately by three admissions tutors.

### **4.2.5 Specialist applications – Art and Design**

Over 1500 Art and Design courses are offered by 180 institutions. Degree course applications are made via UCAS and the application route has to meet the usual mid-January deadline. Some colleges may require a slightly later date of mid-March and you need to check for the requirements in the prospectus. Most art and design courses will require submission of some work, either before or during an interview process, so be prepared to have a range of work available for this eventuality.

## **4.3 Interviews**

### **4.3.1 General interview advice**

Given the subjective and individual nature of interviews, it is only possible to give general advice on preparation. It is worth stressing that whilst some interviews (for instance Oxbridge and Medicine) can be very demanding, interviews at other institutions can be much more relaxed and in some cases they are no more than a thinly disguised sales pitch to encourage you to choose a particular university. The school will do its best to provide you with interview practice along with guidance of some do's and do not's by way of interview tips. Remember too that interviewers are not trying to trip you up; they are trying to assess your potential and you are best placed to do this if you are at ease. The very best interviewers will go out of their way to settle your nerves throughout the interview.

### **4.3.2 Before the interview**

Keep a copy of your personal statement and re-read it to remind yourself of its contents. You must be prepared to discuss anything included in it. Research some topics that interest you and be ready to talk about them at your interview. Plan your travel arrangements so that you arrive in good time. Familiarise yourself with the course prospectus. Make a note of anything you are

unclear about and may wish to clarify at the interview. Try to anticipate some likely questions and prepare for them e.g. Why this course? Why this institution? However, many interviewers will want to take you beyond your A-level work to see how you cope with new ideas and concepts. You must be prepared to engage in such discussions and recognise that the interviewer will often help you through the new concept with some suggested lines of thought. Do not include anything in your personal statement that you are not prepared to talk about. What you write there invites questions on those topics.

### **4.3.3 On the day**

Arrive at the place of interview early which will afford you time to settle after your journey and to collect your thoughts. Wear suitable clothes (aim on the side of caution and dress formally - you can always ditch the jacket if need be!) and always be polite to any receptionist or other employees you come into contact with. They will likely feedback information to the interviewers, especially if you are rude or offhand. Body language is important, so try to appear alert, interested and positive.

It is not always what you answer but how you answer that can be important. Interviewers are looking for articulate students who are not afraid to express an opinion and who are also prepared to consider alternative points of view. Positivity counts! You would not have got this far if the university did not feel you had something worthwhile to offer. Try not to rush into your answers; a short pause before answering will afford you time to collect your thoughts allowing you to give a more precise and considered response.

If you are asked about topics that you haven't studied at school, let the interviewer know that this is an unfamiliar area to you, but you must be prepared to tackle the topic if pressed. This is a typical technique used by interviewers to assess your ability to think critically, listen effectively and to assess your overall potential. Interviewers will normally help you through such questions and are trying to judge your ability to cope with new ideas. Aim to work from what you know towards the unfamiliar.

Avoid long, rambling answers and be prepared to say that you don't know if you are unable to offer anything meaningful by way of a considered response. Remember too that an interview is a two-way process. Do not be afraid to ask questions during interview for clarification or at the end using the opportunity that you will usually be afforded at the end of the interview.

### **4.3.4 A note about Oxbridge interviews**

Oxbridge candidates should note that both Universities are normally very inflexible in their interview timetables. It is most unlikely that any College will be prepared to reschedule interviews simply on the grounds that they are not convenient for individual candidates. The problem is particularly acute at Cambridge and candidates must ensure they will be available for interviews at any time in December and for possible 'pool' interviews in January. Holidays

should not be booked until interview requirements are known. This may not be until late November or even early December. Consult the current Oxford or Cambridge prospectus for more specific information concerning interview dates.

Considerably more detail will be made available to candidates at the start of year 13 for interview considerations, including reference to interview feedback from Richard Hale School candidates who have attended Oxbridge interviews in the recent past. Please also be aware of the multitude of reference materials available online, some of which are referenced in the School's Oxbridge Google Classroom.

Useful link for typical Oxbridge interview questions: -

- [Oxbridge Applications](#)

including multiple interview questions sorted by subject (students will need to sign up to access these): -

- [30 Real-Life Oxford and Cambridge Interview Questions - Oxbridge Applications](#)
- [20 Real-Life Oxford and Cambridge Interview Questions - Oxbridge Applications](#)

#### **4.4 Taking a gap year**

Many university authorities seem in favour of a gap year, provided the year is spent on enterprising, mind-broadening activities, preferably abroad. Some subjects, notably mathematics, are said to be adversely affected by a period of inactivity, whilst Oxbridge colleges and some very competitive universities, such as Bristol, may be reluctant to mortgage a place one year in advance. Those wishing to take a gap year should always check with the relevant university department / college first.

Parents often fear that their sons and daughters will lose their interest in study and will come back from a trip abroad with no motivation for higher education left. Our experience has usually been quite the reverse, for we find that our students return as young adults, more mature and with renewed zest for their subject, and often with a clearer idea of what they really want to do.

There are two main types of gap year: -

- undertaking a job, perhaps in a foreign country, staying there long enough to become immersed in the people and the culture
- going round the world on a jolly trip designed primarily to produce a glamorous sun-tan and a repertoire of anecdotes

We do what we can to help students in the first category but on the whole we are happy to let those in the second fend for themselves.

Work permits can be a real obstacle, especially in Malaysia, New Zealand and the USA. There are ways round it, but you will need careful advice and please do not make the mistake of expecting to earn much money. You will need some funds behind you before you embark on a gap year overseas and for most people, this is realised by finding a temporary job from July to December and to save hard. In most overseas jobs, accommodation and food will be provided for you, but you will not be given much in the way of spending money and you will want to make the most of any opportunity for trips and leisure activities.

There are agencies which cater for certain kinds of work. *The Project Trust* operates mainly in developing countries, while GAP (Gap Activities Projects) and *Teaching Abroad* place young people in all kinds of countries and all kinds of work. Both charge a fee. *The Year in Industry* arranges industrial placements in this country. *Community Service Volunteers (CSV)* also operates in this country, arranging essential social work for needy or handicapped people.

As you progress your UCAS application, if you find that you are certain that you want to take a gap year, simply tick the relevant boxes on the form and explain in your personal statement what you intend to do during the year. If you are not sure, apply for the immediate year and ask for deferment later when you have some positive plans as to how you would like to spend your gap year. Most Universities are understanding about this, as long as you ask politely, have some interesting activity lined up and don't mess them about.

Please don't make the mistake of leaving your gap year plans to the last minute! Be mindful that during your gap year, if you intend to re-apply to UCAS (or even to apply to UCAS for the first time) then be sure to complete your application early. Contact the School in September so that you can affiliate your application to Richard Hale School and keep in contact. This approach will not only alert us to your plans that your application is on the system, but we are also likely to be able to offer advice on your personal statement and provide an amended reference.

## 5. Financial considerations



With significant financial costs, repayable over an indeterminate amount of time, the overall financial impact of attending university can be of considerable concern to students and parents alike. Make use of the student finance calculator on the student finance website to help illustrate the likely financial impact of university study.

- [Student Guides | MoneySavingExpert](#)
- [Check how much student finance you could get - GOV.UK](#)

## 5.1 Student Finance

The financial implications of studying at university are one of the major concerns underpinning any decision relating to your post-18 pathway plans. The pleasures of living away from home and enjoying the student lifestyle are balanced with the need to fund them! In this section we give you an overview of the system, but must state that every individual will differ with regard to the amount of financial support they will receive. It is the responsibility of each family to complete any financial application forms. The student finance website provides a detailed explanation of what costs are involved and what assistance is available, applications for which are made on this website. It is vital that you read the information on this site as soon as you have your decision to apply to university.



- [www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk](http://www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk)

## 5.2 Costs

As a student, there are two inescapable components of your university education that you will have to fund: -

- tuition fees for your course
- living costs, such as rent, food, books, transport and entertainment

Costs will vary depending on where you study, so it's worth doing research on how much you'll need to cover them, in addition to finding out about any help that you'll get through the government's student finance package. Many universities and colleges charge new students up to a £10050 for each year of their course to cover the cost of tuition fees alone, although charges can vary between courses, as well as between different universities and colleges. Living costs will be significant (particularly in London), with some 6 to 9 months of rent, food and associated subsistence costs to find. It is not unusual for a typical university degree to leave the student with a debt of around £40,000 to £50,000, underpinning the need for you to very carefully consider whether university represents the right post-18 choices for you. That said, the majority of graduates will enjoy a lifetime salary considerably greater than those of the average non-graduate, making the initial financial sacrifice well worth making.

## 5.3 Financial support

The good news is that tuition fees do not have to be paid by you whilst you are studying. Although you can privately finance your tuition fees if you are in the fortunate position to be able to do so, the Government will allow you to take out a student loan to cover the tuition fees charged by your university or college (you never see this money as the government pay it direct to your chosen university on your behalf). You only start repaying this loan once you have finished studying and you are earning a salary above a threshold level. The amount you repay is a modest percentage of your salary above the threshold level and for your early years of employment, your student loan repayment costs are likely to be equivalent to the cost of a typical mobile phone contract (see Appendix for details). Under certain circumstances, you might even be eligible to defer repayment for up to five years. However, be aware that your tuition fee loan does not come interest free; every pound of your debt will attract interest at a marginally greater rate than the prevailing rate of inflation. Although interest accrual will serve to increase your outstanding student debt for those earning less than the threshold level, under 'plan 5' your student debt will be written off after 40 years should any of it remain outstanding (under current Government rules). For this reason you could consider repayment of your student loan as a notional increased rate of tax on your earnings.

You can also apply for a maintenance loan which covers some of the costs related to your living expenses. This is means tested via the on-line application form and is directly linked to your household income. In reality, almost all students are eligible for a 'base amount' maintenance loan, with an 'extra amount' that is means tested. The amount of financial support that you are able to secure not only depends on household income, but also depends on whether you choose to live at home, study and live in London or away from the capital. As with loans to cost the cover of tuition, maintenance loans will also attract interest and require repayment.

<b>Where you live and/or study</b>	<b>Maximum Maintenance Loan (not means tested)</b>	<b>Minimum Maintenance Loan</b>
Living with parent(s) or carer(s)	£9,118	£4,013
Living away from home (outside London)	£10,830	£5,048
Living away from home (in London)	£14,135	£7,039
Studying abroad as part of a UK course	£12,403	£5,996

Maintenance Grants (traditionally open to students from the lower income brackets and not requiring repayment) are no longer available.

Other types of financial support come in the form of bursaries which are available from a wide range of institutions and individual subject departments. Many universities will offer financial

support, with some offering them to students based on A-level results. There is no set pattern to their availability and hence very careful research will be needed on your part if you are to take advantage of them, early application for which will invariably be advantageous.

As a final thought, be sure to access and register for the student finance package on the government website as soon as possible. Research carefully, particularly for any bursaries that are on offer from universities and awards that can be gained by getting AAA grades in certain institutions. Most university websites and prospectuses offer information, help and advice and represent a good starting point for your research.

## 5.4 Student Finance quick guide 2026

If you are a first time undergraduate and apply for a Tuition Fee Loan, your tuition fees are automatically paid by the Student Loans Company to the University on your behalf. Full-time students at the start of their course, can also take a loan to pay for their living costs, e.g. food, books, accommodation and travel. These are known as Maintenance Loans and are usually paid in three instalments direct to your bank account.

Repayment of Maintenance Loans and Tuition Fee Loans for English students beginning their course from September 2027, begin from the April following your graduation and when you are earning over £25,000 per year (it was £27,295 but the government has reduced the threshold to £25,000, frozen until 26/27 - it might change further dependent on the Government's intentions).

Student Finance in England

### What's changing?

Start date	Repayment	Max. term	Interest	Impact
Before Sep' 2023	9% over £27,295 frozen until 2025 On £30,000 income you repay £243/yr	30 years (from April after leaving)	Up to RPI +3%	State pays 44p per £1 Only 23% likely to clear in full
Sep' 2023	9% over £25,000 frozen until 2026/7 On £30,000 income you repay £450/yr	40 YEARS (from April after leaving)	RPI (so no 'real' cost)	State pays 19p per £1 52% likely to clear in full

Under 'Plan 5' loans are written off after 40 years. How much you repay each month is linked to how much you earn. How long you have to make these payments depends on how much you borrowed. The interest is added to your loan from the day you receive your first instalment (Maintenance Loan) or the date the University receives your payment (Tuition Fee Loan).

Monthly repayment of loans	
Annual gross income	Monthly repayment
Up to £25,000	£0
£26,000	£7.50
£30,000	£37.50
£35,000	£75.00
£40,000	£112.50
£45,000	£150.00

## Appendices

### UCAS tariffs

The UCAS tariff system that some higher education (HE) providers employ when making offers to students can be seen in the tables below. While the tariff system has been adopted by most HE providers - many will still make offers based on a required set of A-level grades.

An A\* is worth 56 points, an A grade worth 48 points, with a corresponding drop of 8 points per grade down to an E, which is now worth 16 points.

For BTEC Level 3 Extended Diplomas - D\* is now worth 56 points UCAS tariff points, a D is worth 48 points, a merit (M) worth 40 points and a pass (P) worth 32 points.

Although AS level qualifications are still offered by exam boards, few schools have taken up the offer, instead preferring to progress each A-level student onto a 2-year linear pathway, taking us back to the system in place during the 1970's and 1980's. Where AS levels have been secured, the new tariff has served to reduced their value from 50% of an A-level (under the old system) to just 40%. Given that there are no A\* grades at AS level, a grade A at AS level is worth 20 points.

The level 3 Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) offered to all students at the end of year 12 (selection criteria apply) has sometimes been included in offers made by HE providers and has always been looked upon favourably as it demonstrates a refined skill set highly prized by higher education candidates. The EPQ remains the only AS for which an A\* can be awarded but bucks the revised AS weighting by retaining its old 50% value, meaning that an EPQ A\* grade equates to 28 points under the new tariff, with a grade A now worth 24 points (thereafter stepping down in 4 point steps).

The system is still evolving and you should check each university course to see which system they use to make their offer. UCAS do have a points converter tool, so you can always use this to change grades into points when researching courses that have moved over to the new points tariff.

The tables below serve to illustrate how the UCAS tariff system works:

## A-Level

A-level grade	UCAS points
A*	56
A	48
B	40
C	32
D	24
E	16
U	0

## BTEC

BTEC grade	A-level equivalent grade	UCAS points
Distinction (D*)	A*	56
Distinction (D)	A	48
	No BTEC grade equivalent to grade B A-level	-
Merit (M)	C	32
	No BTEC grade equivalent to grade D A-level	-
Pass (P)	E	16
U	U	0

### Pearson BTEC Extended Diploma (QCF)

Grade	Tariff points
D*D*D*	168
D*D*D	160
D*DD	152
DDD	144
DDM	128
DMM	112
MMM	96
MMP	80
MPP	64
PPP	48

## List of admissions tests

In addition to needing to meet standard qualification targets, admissions tests are also used to help universities manage the application process for high demand subjects and to differentiate between high calibre students. Many Russell Group institutions will use them and you should check the course requirements carefully when applying as certain tests have registration dates that close shortly after you return from the summer holidays. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are entered for these tests, so please ensure that you know if you need to take one. The tests do not generally require any extra teaching but it is wise to familiarise yourself with the style of the assessments beforehand. There is a good deal of information to be found online, including past papers and specimen tests. Many of the tests are taken online, but some require that they are taken at a specialist centre which may not be Richard Hale, so be sure to ask if you are not sure.

UCAS provide a list of admissions tests

[University Admissions Tests | UCAS | UCAT, LNAT And More](#)

However, provided below is a list that does not claim to be all-inclusive as other admissions tests may be required that are not listed on this page. Please check the Entry Profiles for your chosen courses, contact your chosen universities and colleges or check their website.

### LNAT

#### Engineering and Science Admissions Test (ESAT)

For entry to Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology, Engineering, Natural Sciences, Veterinary Medicine courses at the University of Cambridge in addition to a number of courses at Imperial College, London

#### Graduate Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT)

For entry into medicine at Plymouth and Exeter

#### History Aptitude Test (HAT)

For entry to modern history and a joint honours degrees involving modern history at the University of Oxford.

#### Health Professions Admissions Test (HPAT)

For entry to certain medical courses at the University of Ulster.

#### Law National Admissions Test (LNAT)

For entry to study Law (Jurisprudence) (Oxford), Law with Law Studies in Europe (Oxford). A two-part exam designed to test an applicant's ability to follow and understand complex arguments. The test is divided into two sections: 42 multiple-choice questions, followed by a

second section consisting of one extended essay. Example question: Would you agree that travel and tourism exploit poorer nations and benefit only the richer ones?

#### Maths Aptitude Test (MAT)

For entry to some hard numerically-related courses at Oxford - increasingly transitioning to TMUA

#### Modern and Medieval Languages Test (MML)

For entry to modern and medieval languages at the University of Cambridge.

#### Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ)

For entry to many courses at the University of Cambridge.

#### Sixth Term Examination Papers (STEP)

For entry to mathematics at the University of Cambridge.

#### Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Cambridge)

For entry to computer science, natural sciences, engineering and economics at the University of Cambridge. A 90-minute, multiple-choice test of 50 questions, divided into 25 problem solving and 25 critical thinking questions. It tests numerical and spatial reasoning, logical thinking, and comprehension of arguments. Example question: A car leaves Canterbury at 7.12am and travels 180 miles to Birmingham, arriving at 10.57 am. What was its average speed in miles per hour?

#### Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Oxford), formerly known as the PPE Admissions Test

For entry to Economics and Management, Experimental Psychology, Geography, Human Sciences, Philosophy and Linguistics, Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE), Psychology and Linguistics, Psychology and Philosophy at Oxford (candidates applying to study Chemistry (F100) and History and Economics\* (LV11) will be required to take Thinking Skills Assessment: Section 1 (TSA S1). The assessment is divided into a 90-minute multiple-choice section, followed by a 30-minute essay question from a choice of four. Example question: Dates may be written in an eight-digit form. For instance, 19 January 2005 may be written 19-01-2005. In what year will the next date occur for which all eight digits are different?

#### Test of Mathematics for University Admission (TMUA Cambridge)

The TMUA tests your mathematical thinking; required if you are applying for Computer Science or Economics at Cambridge.

#### University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT)

For entry to medical and dental schools.

## UCAS 2026 application timeline (for Sept 2027 start)

Please carefully note that the dates and deadlines are external to school. Given the large size of our sixth form and the significant number of university applications to process, internal deadlines by necessity have to be earlier than those published by UCAS.



JAN  
13

**(18:00 UK time) Equal consideration date for applications for most undergraduate courses**

- The reference must be completed before the application can be sent to us.
- Deadline for most conservatoire undergraduate dance, drama or musical theatre courses. Check on the specific course to be sure.

FEB  
09

**UCAS Conservatoires applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 7 January, they must reply by 9 February, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD).

FEB  
25

**Extra opens**

Applicants who have used all five choices and are not holding any offers may be able to add another choice in their application.

MAR  
31

**Providers should aim to have sent all decisions on applications received at UCAS by 13 January**

APR  
06

**UCAS Conservatoires applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 11 March, they must reply by 6 April, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD).

MAY  
05

**UCAS Undergraduate applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 31 March, they must reply by 5 May, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD). Except for those applicants in Extra.

MAY  
12

**UCAS Undergraduate reject by default (RBD)**

Provider decisions due on applications submitted by 13 January. Otherwise applicants will be rejected by default (RBD).

- JUN 02 UCAS Conservatoires applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 13 May, they must reply by 2 June, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD).
- JUN 02 UCAS Undergraduate applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 12 May, they must reply by 2 June, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD). Except for those applicants in Extra.
- JUN 30 (18:00 UK time) Applications received by this deadline will be sent to universities and colleges**

After this time, applications are automatically entered into Clearing.
- JUL 01 Last day for applicants to add an Extra choice in their application**
- JUL 02 Clearing opens for eligible applicants, and vacancies are displayed in UCAS' search tool**

Applicants can release themselves into Clearing.
- JUL 06 UCAS Conservatoires reject by default (RBD)**

Conservatoire decisions due on applications submitted by 30 April. Otherwise applicants will be rejected by default (RBD).
- JUL 14 UCAS Undergraduate reject by default (RBD)**

Provider decisions due on applications submitted by 30 June. Otherwise applicants will be rejected by default (RBD).
- JUL 19 UCAS Conservatoires applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 6 July, they must reply by 19 July, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD).

- JUL 20 UCAS Conservatoires reject by default (RBD)**

Conservatoire decisions due on applications submitted by 1 June. Otherwise applicants will be rejected by default (RBD).
- JUL 21 UCAS Undergraduate applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 14 July, they must reply by 21 July, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD), including those in Extra.
- SEP 07 UCAS Conservatoires applicant decline by default (DBD)**

If applicants receive all decisions by 2 August, they must reply by 7 September, otherwise their application will be declined by default (DBD).
- SEP 23 Final date for 2027 entry applications**
- OCT 18 Last date to add 2027 entry Clearing choice**

## Richard Hale School internal timeline

There are a number of key components that underpin any successful university application. Born of numerous years of experience, the following table provides a checklist of what you need to have done and by when.

DATE	ACTION	NOTES
Summer term 2026	<p>Begin your university course and location research</p> <p>Draft and refine your personal statement</p> <p>Enter your details onto the UCAS hub</p> <p>Access the Post-18 Pathways resources via the UCAS Google Classroom</p>	<p>Use this guide as a good starting point</p> <p>Use the guidance provided in assembly, the resources on GC's and your form tutor</p> <p>Attend the assembly on what to do and ensure that you have read this guide along with the online slides presentation available on Google Classroom</p>
By the end of the Summer term	Ensure that your personal statement is finalised	
Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2026	Internal deadline for Oxbridge students to have finalised their personal statements	Your personal statement is required by your referee who will author your Oxbridge UCAS reference
Friday 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2026	Internal deadline for Oxbridge, Medicine, Veterinary and Dentistry applications	You will go through your finalised application with a member of the sixth form team as a final check ahead of submission by the School
Oct 2026	Personal statement revisions	If your personal statement still needs work, now is the time to complete it
Oct 2026	Submit your UCAS application electronically to allow for your reference to be added	

Friday 13 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2026	Internal deadline for submission (by you) of all university applications (ie you must 'pay and send')	You will go through your finalised application with a member of the sixth form team as a final check ahead of submission by the School
Nov 2026	Practice interviews for those that need them  Offer notifications begin	Organised within school
Dec 2026	Oxbridge interviews and notification of offer	By colleges
1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 2027	Art and Design courses open	System identical to all other courses, students should be ready to send off applications immediately
Jan 2027	BTEC Exams and mock A Level examinations	Examinations undertaken at RHS
Mar 2027	Students must complete on-line Student Finance application forms.	These are required to qualify for part-payment of fees and the right to apply for a student loan.
Mar/Apr 2027	Students notify UCAS of their firm and insurance choices	
May 2027	Confirm firm and insurance offers by this date	UCAS will contact students to inform you of the exact deadline date
May 2027	A Level examinations begin	External examinations undertaken at RHS
Aug 2027	A Level and BTEC results published	Use Clearing if your grades are higher or lower than you expected and want to consider alternatives.

## Details of this year's UCAS application costs

The UCAS application fee will be £34.50 permitting you to apply for up to 5 courses.

## List of university websites

Wikipedia possibly offers the most concise list of universities with associated links. Find it here:

- [List of universities in the United Kingdom - Wikipedia](#)

## Student loans

If you're starting university in September 2027, you will repay your loan over a 40-year period. But it's only repayable once you start earning over a certain threshold.

The threshold for repayments is currently £25,000. Once your salary is above this amount you will pay back 9% of everything you earn before tax. The interest rate is capped at the retail price index (RPI) rate of inflation.

It's important to remember that if you don't earn over the threshold, you are not required to make any loan repayments although you will still be accruing interest.

Most people never actually pay off the full loan amount which will likely render it the cheapest loan you are ever likely to receive (other than those from the 'Bank of Mum and Dad'). In this sense a student loan is more like a graduate tax, with higher earners paying back more over time. Any outstanding loan amounts are currently written off after 40 years.

## A word for (worried) parents / guardians

Advising students on university applications and making key decisions about their future pathways can often be a challenge. You'll no doubt want to support your child's application to university or apprenticeship as much as you can, but how can you do that?

Higher education, or apprenticeships and school leaver programmes can open many doors to new and exciting opportunities which your son or daughter can benefit from and there are now plenty of programmes where your child would gain a qualification 'on the job' and earn money at the same time. A degree helps a student to develop and refine skills, gain valuable experience in a particular academic field and shows employers that they are a good investment for the future. Going to university can help your child to gain life skills such as independence and maturity, make those all-important life-long friends and to develop their interests through joining clubs and societies. Having said that, it is not for everyone and any notion that it is the only route to success are now outdated. If your child enjoys academic work and is keen to go to university, there will definitely be a course and institution out there for him or her. It's important to encourage your child to fulfil their potential and aim high, while being realistic about their capabilities and motivation.

The UCAS application allows each applicant to choose five different universities to apply to. It is sensible to apply to a range of universities, with perhaps a 'top two' and three 'fall back' options. If your son or daughter is unsure whether or not they want to go to university, remind them that they can always apply this year and change their mind or defer their course if they want to take a gap year. It's very common for students to want to go to university, but have no idea what they want to study! The overriding factor when making their decision should be picking a subject they enjoy – either in school or outside of school. They will have to immerse themselves into this subject for the next three years or more at an advanced level, so

just getting a top grade at A-level or equivalent should not be the only factor. There are hundreds of choices available, including combined honours; degree choices should not be restricted to subjects enjoyed at A-level, so encourage your son or daughter to think about what they enjoy and why.

UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is the centralised body which coordinates all the applications to undergraduate degrees at UK universities. Their website provides a full list of courses available with their entrance requirements. Universities often have subject-specific open days which can give a better idea of what the course will involve. It's important to make your child aware that selecting a course doesn't always mean they are selecting their future career (unless they are studying a vocational course such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, etc.). Many students who study a particular course at university, will go on to work in industries completely unrelated to their degree, but the skills they developed whilst at university allowed them to get to where they are now. Every university applicant must apply through UCAS by filling in what is known as the UCAS form. Perhaps the most challenging section of the form is the personal statement, where applicants write about 600 words about their background and their reasons for choosing their course. Significant help and guidance is offered at school but you can help your child with their personal statement by encouraging them to start working on it during the summer term of year 12 and offering to proof read their drafts.

A keen interest in the subject is one of the most important deciding factors when admissions tutors offer places. It's important to read outside of the recommended curriculum books and to be familiar with current affairs, especially within the sector of the subject. Broadsheet newspapers will offer news on all subjects and 'The Week' offers an overview of all newspapers on a weekly basis. Students wanting to study Economics and finance for example, will find publications like 'The Economist' useful, whilst medics might want to read the 'New Scientist'. Encourage your child to read around their subject might be something that the school can help with, or most universities publish reading lists on their websites.