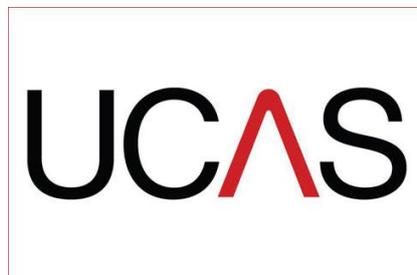




Jordanhill School



UCAS: Guide to University Applications



UCAS Booklet

Introduction

This booklet is not intended to replace the other paperwork which you will be given at various stages and it is certainly not supposed to be exhaustive. It is simply a collection of some useful advice about the UCAS process and should help to anticipate some frequently asked questions. It cannot be stressed strongly enough that **the onus is on each candidate to undertake very careful research before filling in an application.**



In addition, it is worth pointing out how useful the UCAS website is (www.ucas.com): it is a veritable treasure trove of excellent advice, videos and links. The process can seem daunting but plenty of advice is available from Heads of House and the senior management team.

UCAS

The acronym UCAS stands for The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Its role is to provide the application process for British universities. It also operates a number of other admissions services including UCAS Conservatoires which deals with entry to performing arts at UK conservatoires.

The UCAS application is completed online and details about logging on using the school buzzword (password) are issued annually.

The applicant has to fill in personal details, previous exam results, future exams, choice of up to five universities (or four for Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Dentistry) and a personal statement. In addition, the school will provide a reference for each candidate. The five choices are not ranked in any order and the universities have no idea where else you have applied. Although most candidates fill in all five choices at the same time, it is possible to add choices at different stages up until the deadline.

It is sensible to have a range of choices in order to help your chances. If you apply to five extremely competitive institutions then you might not get in anywhere. One option would be to apply to a couple of aspirational and competitive universities, a couple in the middle where you think you have a good chance, and a 'safety net' where you are very likely to get an easy offer or an unconditional. An excellent piece of advice is that you should be happy to attend all five of your chosen course and universities because it is rare to get five offers and you might only get one or two.



UCAS Conservatoires

The old CUKAS (The Conservatoires UK Admissions Service) has been rebranded as UCAS Conservatoires. Admissions to these performing arts institutions will now be via the UCAS website although the application is separate and many of the details are different, such as the need for two referees. You can apply to six UCAS Conservatoire choices in addition to your five UCAS choices. The emphasis is on practical development leading to a career in the creative arts. The deadline for most music courses is October and for drama courses January but courses vary – **check your deadline!**

Two references are required and you must discuss your application with your Head of House and Mrs Gilmour well before the deadline to ensure these can be completed on time.

Deadlines

October 15th for Early Applicants (Oxford, Cambridge, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine/Science and Dentistry) and January 15th for other Applicants. Although these are the official deadlines, our schools have our own internal deadlines which you must abide by. Some creative courses (conservatoires or art colleges) have different deadlines – **check!**

Ensure you discuss early applications with Dr Thomson.

Why University?

- Enhanced career prospects and increased potential earning on average
- Develop the whole person - improve independence, self-confidence, responsibility and other key skills
- Love of learning and the opportunity to study something new or to expand your knowledge in a subject you are already passionate about
- But not right for everyone and a 'horses for courses' approach is wise. Other options include College, Apprenticeships and Jobs – the Careers adviser and Head of House are happy to advise on all of these options.

Fees

All applicants should apply to SAAS (Student Awards Agency for Scotland) in June of S6 for funding.

Universities charge tuition fees to cover the costs of delivering your degree programme.



In Scotland you will not have to cover this cost if you are resident in Scotland. In England, most universities will charge you £9000 per annum (although the latest Government White Paper proposes a rise in the maximum cap in line with inflation) for tuition, but you can receive a loan for this and pay it back later in life. Details can be found on the SAAS website (www.saas.gov.uk).



One myth is that university in Scotland is free but once you add up accommodation and living costs it can amount to £8000 - £10,000 per annum. Again, a loan can be taken out through SAAS. You will receive advice on applying through SAAS in PSHE.

Where?

If you decide that university is for you then you have the option of studying abroad but this booklet will focus on UCAS. There are over 300 institutions as part of the UCAS system so it is important to have a close look at where you might want to study. In addition to courses available, the choice of university will include considerations such as location (distance from home, weather etc.), campus or city, size, accommodation, facilities, options to study abroad, placements, graduate employment rates, reputation (league table etc.), nature of assessment, quality of teaching etc.



Scotland or England?

This is one of the key considerations. Some of our pupils apply to at least one English university as one of their five choices – this confuses some people south of the border who are surprised that anyone would choose to pay fees when they don't have to in Scotland.

- **Fees:** there is not actually as big a difference in cost as you would think, because English courses tend to be 3 years instead of 4 so there is a year less of accommodation etc. to pay. In addition, all things being equal you would hope to start a job a year earlier and therefore have a year's salary before your peers in Scotland graduate. You only start paying fees back when you start earning a certain salary after graduation – details, including the rate at which you pay back, can be found on the SAAS website.
- **Competition:** because the fees of Scottish students at Scottish universities are paid largely by the Scottish government, these numbers are capped (there are also EU students fighting for the same number of limited places). This means that competition for good courses at good universities is fiercer now than it has ever been. In England, there is no cap on good quality students (apart from practical considerations) so our pupils are getting some good offers to top quality English institutions.

- Courses: there are far more courses on offer in England because of the sheer number of universities, so our pupils can sometimes only find the course they want to study in England.
- Culture: some people want a complete change of environment and culture.

Having said all that, a large majority of our pupils decide to stay in Scotland where we have a number of top class universities with an excellent reputation. An additional advantage of a Scottish university can be that the first two years are broader than in England with additional subjects, and that it is sometimes easier to swap to another subject in the same Faculty than it is in England although this is becoming more difficult and there is certainly no guarantee. Again, each individual should decide what is best for them.

Courses?

This is just as important, or more important than the university. You must be motivated (or even passionate!) about your course. There is a huge range of about 50,000 courses. One simple starting question would be to ask yourself whether you want to carry on a school subject at university or start something new. Both of these options require careful research – is Geography at Glasgow University the same as Geography at Edinburgh? Is Geography at Glasgow the same as it is at Dundee? If you choose a ‘new’ subject, do you know what studying Psychology, for example, actually entails? The ideal course would be one which interests you, where you have good ability and will do well, and one which leads on to a certain career or keeps your career options open. You can apply for different courses at each university but be aware that **you only have one personal statement**. Some courses can be studied as either a BSc or an MA – there may be a slight difference in content but often the two main factors in choosing are entry requirements (science subject/s required for BSc) and additional courses (it is usually easier to study other science courses at university in Scotland if you choose the BSc). It is crucial to read the small print in prospectuses: for example, some Economics courses require a very high level of Maths whereas others do not.



Joint honours:

This option is quite popular (about 18% of undergraduates in the UK follow this route) but requires very careful research. Does the combined honours course give you the necessary professional qualification (e.g. in Law)? Which modules will you be able to choose in each subject? Joint honours should not be contemplated lightly. You must satisfy two departments equally in your statement and they often have limited places.

Degree courses and careers:

Some courses are vocational and lead directly on to specific jobs. Examples of this would be Medicine, Engineering and Law where you need degrees in these subjects in order to follow a career in that area. However, people with these degrees sometimes end up in unrelated jobs later in life. Also, you can do a Law conversion course having obtained an undergraduate degree in another subject first. It is interesting to note that about 70% of graduate employers do not care what course you follow at university, so that opens up the option of studying something which interests you and which you are good at.



Grades required/subjects required:

University websites will give you an indication of the grades for which they are looking. However, care needs to be taken about whether these grades are 'minimum' or 'likely'. It is not an exact science in most cases because universities do not know in advance exactly how many applicants they will have. One particularly difficult issue is that English universities can be vague about how many Advanced Highers they require and it is worth contacting their admissions team if you are unsure. Universities have three options when considering your

application: Unconditional (based on your Higher grades), Conditional (based on your S6 exams) and Rejection. In addition, certain institutions can invite candidates for interview or to see additional work (e.g. portfolios for design subjects). As well as working out what grades are likely to be required, be very careful about whether university courses require specific school subjects. There is a difference between 'required' and 'recommended'. It is often wise to email university admissions staff if you are in any doubt at all.

Also, most Scottish universities do not double count Highers and Advanced Highers in the same subject i.e. they only count a subject once in meeting entry requirements.

Accepting offers:

If you receive all your offers before the end of March then you must reply by the first week of May. If not then you get an extension until the first week of June. **If you miss your deadline for replying to offers then you will be deemed to have declined by default.** Your options when replying to offers are Firm Acceptance (F), which is like a first choice, or Insurance Acceptance (I), which is a back-up choice. If your Firm choice is an Unconditional then that is all you have to do; if your Firm choice is a Conditional then you can also accept an Insurance. When results come out in August, if you achieve your Conditional grades then you are accepted. Every year there are problems with people not getting into their Firm choice and then turning down their Insurance choice because they 'never wanted to go there anyway'. It is important that you should want to go to the places which you accept! If you have been rejected or have declined all offers by the end of February then there is a service called 'UCAS Extra' which enables you to add an extra choice from those university courses which still have spaces – in our experience this is very rare, especially at Scottish universities.

Placements or year abroad:

This can be an excellent option for students and it can add value to your CV in terms of impressing employers. Again, you can find out in advance what options are available in your chosen course. Sometimes you have to specify in advance that you want to take this option; but some institutions let you decide once you are there. Industrial placements, the Erasmus scheme, and study in the US are examples which can be available. A 'year abroad' can sometimes be a 'semester abroad' as well. All placements can be conditional on academic performance. Some universities are better than others in terms of helping you to find suitable placements.

Internships:

These can help to impress potential employers. Students in the summer after 2nd year (in England) or 3rd year (in Scotland) can undertake internships. These are competitive and employers look at your exam results so far as well as other factors. Some universities and courses have excellent links with employers but at others you are left to fend for yourself. You can ask universities about opportunities when you attend Open Days.

Campuses:

Be careful if a university has more than one campus because this might affect your application. One example of this is Glasgow University which has campuses in Glasgow and Dumfries.



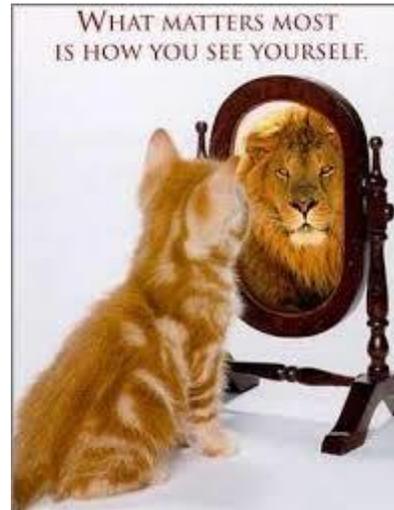
Research:

This is probably the most important message in this booklet. Every year there are students, including a small number of FPs, who drop out of their university course because it is not what they expected. Recent examples include 'I didn't realise Aberdeen was so cold', 'St Andrews is too small' and 'I didn't know that there would be any science in Sports Science'! Much of this can be prevented by careful research. Open Days can be useful, although individual visits are often just as valuable; university websites (including individual department websites) are a mine of information; excellent links through Futurewise website; www.unistats.com; www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk. The onus is on each applicant to conduct careful research and it may often be a good idea for you to contact universities yourself in order to get advice or ask questions. However, we are aware that individual circumstances do change and the school is happy to assist FPs with applications after they leave school as long as sufficient notice is given.

The list of Open Days for Scottish Universities is published on O365 and on the noticeboards outside the school library. Ensure you advise your tutor/Head of House if you plan to attend an Open Day during school hours.

FPs:

Another very useful resource is Former Pupils who are often happy to speak to and advise our pupils about their experiences. If you would like to have this opportunity then speak to your Head of House who might be able to put you in touch with a suitable FP.



Personal Statements:

The personal statement is your opportunity to tell universities about your suitability for the course which you hope to study.

- There is no such thing as a 'model statement' and each one should be personal and different.
- Your statement should be 47 lines or 4000 characters including spaces. If you have something which you are desperate to include but you don't have space then speak to your referee who may be able to include that in your reference.
- You need to demonstrate your **enthusiasm and commitment**, and ensure that you stand out from the crowd. 70-80% of your personal statement should be focused on the course and why you want to apply for it. You only get one personal statement so make sure that your course choices are similar enough to mention easily in the same statement (e.g. Medicine and Architecture would not work, but History and Politics would). In case of doubt, mention the course that you are most keen on first and give it more weight. Universities look for in-depth engagement with your chosen course.
- Mention relevant experience: this may be work experience or attending a talk or reading a book. Make sure that you refer to your work experience and reflect on what you learned from it, even if it is not directly relevant.
- Try to demonstrate your academic skills or qualities.
- Be specific rather than bland. If possible, link to course content.
- Use extra-curricular interests to demonstrate that you possess skills which will enable you to succeed at university. Universities, like employers, seek evidence of transferable skills.
- The personal statement could be used as a basis for an interview, so be prepared to answer questions on it.
- Get your grammar and spelling correct.
- Be very careful indeed about plagiarism – UCAS use software to pick up on this.
- University course websites can be very useful in terms of you pitching your personal statement correctly. They often say what they are looking for in an applicant.

Entrance Tests:

Some universities will ask for additional tests (especially for Medicine, Vet Medicine, Dentistry, Law at certain places etc.). **You need to find out whether you need to take one of these tests (UKCAT, BMAT, LNAT) and, if so, the details of timing and content.** In addition, Oxford and Cambridge will have many of their own tests.

Candidates should also check to find out whether they register individually for the different Entrance Tests or whether this is done through the school. If the school needs to register the candidate, students should inform Ms McDade that they wish to be enrolled for the test before 30 September.

Interviews:

Some universities and courses require interviews (Oxford, Cambridge, Medicine, Vet Medicine, Dentistry, Art and Design courses etc.) so make sure you prepare properly for these. There is an opportunity to sign up for mock interviews in the first term of S6.



Oxford and Cambridge:

These two institutions operate a unique application system. Most of our candidates apply to a specific college, although an open application is also a possibility. It is vital that you find out exactly what is required by the individual university and college. Both Oxford and Cambridge are almost exclusively looking for candidates who are very able and passionate about their chosen course, and who will thrive in their system of small scale tutorials. If you are interested in applying then please make sure that you contact Dr Thomson.

Gap Year: If you intend to take a Gap Year then speak to your Head of House. You can apply for ‘deferred entry’ but check that the university will be happy to consider this. The alternative is to wait until you have finished S6 and then apply at the start of your Gap Year – the school will still assist you with the application. If you do take a gap year, it’s important to have a plan in place for this to ensure you maximise the opportunity a year out can offer.



After results

If you fail to get the grades for your Conditional Firm choice, it is worth contacting the university to see if they will still accept you. Sometimes they do indeed accept 'narrow misses'. If not, then you will gain entry to your Insurance choice, as long as you have achieved their requirements. If you fail to get into either of your choices then there is a system called 'Clearing' where university courses which still have places are available for you to apply. However, there tend to be very few of these in Scotland for Scottish applicants (make sure you check whether the Clearing place is available for Scottish applicants rather than Rest of the UK). Obviously you should be in touch with the school as well in order to get appropriate advice.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE OPEN DAYS

1. Open days provide an opportunity to find out more about universities. Letters seeking leave of absence should be given to your tutor/Head of House in advance.
 2. Details of Open Days will be posted on the notice boards outside the library and/or on O365
 3. The UCAS website www.ucas.com is a mine of helpful information; as is www.opendays.com
 4. The dates of Open Days which are readily accessible from Edinburgh or for universities and colleges that are particularly popular with our students are listed below; please note that a number of them will require booking some time in advance to secure admission to the Open Day. Full information about booking is usually available on the university websites.
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- Some universities do not organise formal Open Days, but are pleased to arrange visits on an individual or group basis. Details published on university websites. In fact, visiting a university at any time is very worthwhile – you can learn a lot from looking at the site, buildings etc.
 - In all cases, check websites and book if necessary.

Top ten tips:

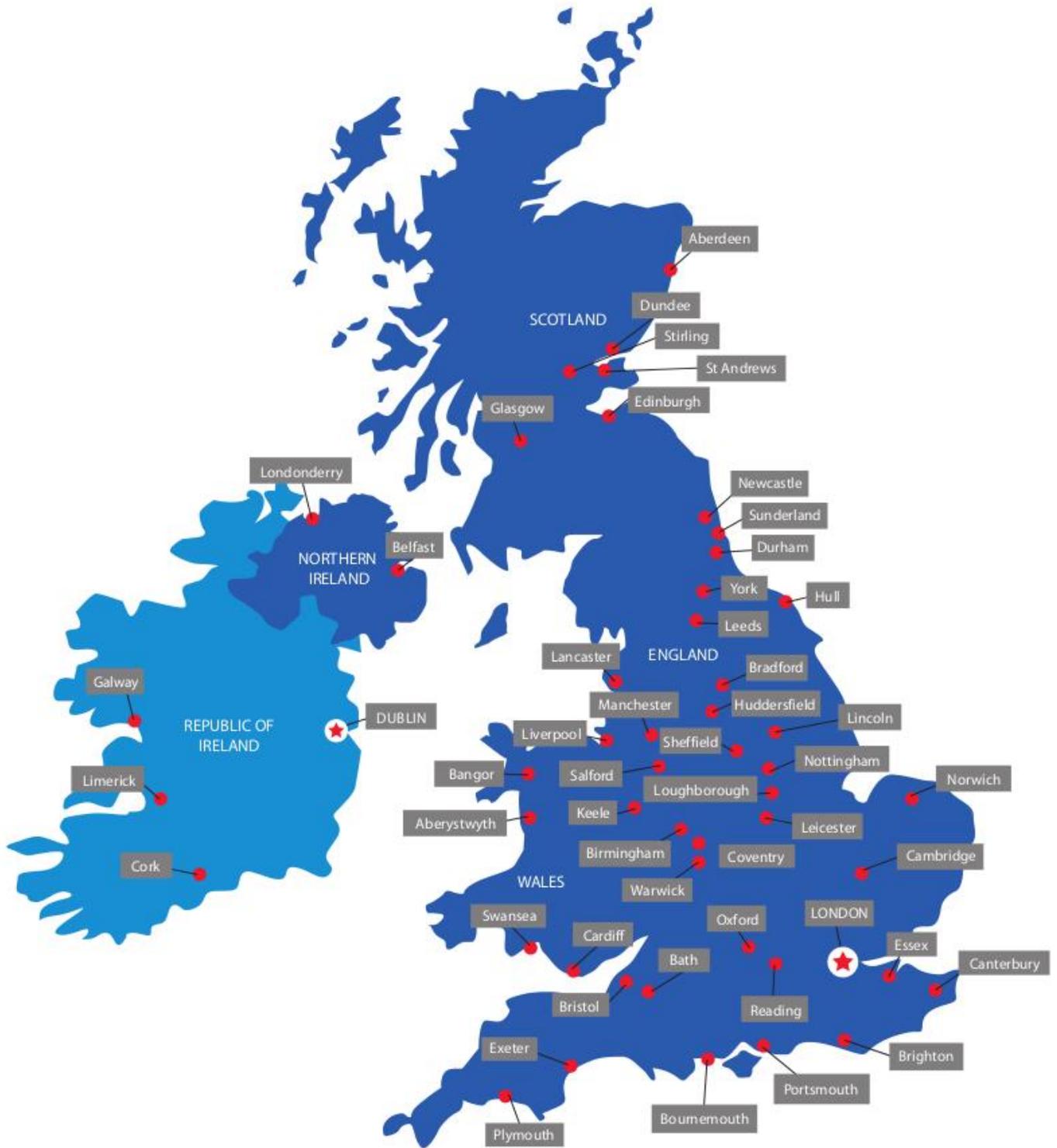
1. Do careful research – the onus is on you to undertake this
2. Give yourself a sensible range of five choices – make sure you are happy with all of them
3. Stick to deadlines
4. Do you need alternative to UCAS? Abroad? College? Apprenticeship?
5. Decide which universities suit you
6. Decide which course suits you
7. Ask for advice in good time from different people
8. Entrance tests and/or interviews: find out if these are needed and prepare properly
9. Draft a Personal Statement in good time
10. DO CAREFUL RESEARCH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Conclusion:

It is amazing how busy the first term of S6 can be, so it is sensible to use the summer holidays in order to conduct some research. This may involve a mixture of websites, reading and visits. You should also draft a personal statement. Even if you don't yet know exactly what course or universities you want to apply to, you can at least get some sort of structure organised.





UCAS

**KEEP
CALM
AND
DO
UCAS**